

TO HEAVEN WITH THE DEVIL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Fandango for a Crown of Thorns
A Story at Canons

*TO HEAVEN
WITH THE DEVIL*
HAROLD ELVIN



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**FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1914 BY
PETER NEVIL LTD.
50 OLD BROMPTON ROAD, LONDON, S.W.7
122 EAST 55TH STREET, NEW YORK 22**

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BARNICOTTS LTD.
TAUNTON**

PART I

“Out! Get the horses out Haeno! We can’t leave the child here to die! Get the horses out ready! I’m leaving for Viborg to-night! To Viborg! To Viborg! She’ll die if I don’t take her to Viborg this instant!”

The Prince got his schuba, his astrakhan, his sable furs, gathered his eight hours daughter to his arms, wrapped her with rugs right round her and without another word, left.

Out into the Finnish night, into the crisp metallic cold. That ever endless wall and corridor of pine. No wonder that for Scandinavia Hell means cold.

So her mother refuses the mite food? Then there is nothing left but to rush the brat to Viborg. Her mother swears he has been with Ritva all these last nine months? Then he can give his child to his Ritva? . . . so she says; she, her mother, won’t succour her, not for an hour, not for a second. And he doesn’t want the wretched chit either. Good riddance . . . somehow. Yes he has been with his Ritva: seduced her twice: and now there might be another child from her too! . . . That he could handle. This one was different.

Out and on in the frozen night, galloping into that soulless vacuum of forty degrees under zero.

A man for the ladies he was. Such a lithe physique, such a fine moustache. Now he’d nearly had enough of Ritva. He must call on that long-legged Swedish dream Sabina when he was in Viborg. Sinuous snaky willow.

How loud is quiet. How crowded out with eyes is

darkness. Forty miles to Sakkijarvi then twenty more to Viborg. And just the whistling of the runners of the sleigh, twaying, trnrusting, curving, cutting, incising this ermine carpet in this hall of ice and death. . .

No town, no farm, no living person even. No inn, no food, no schnapps or vodka even. Just the slithering of the skis of the sleigh through this tunnel night of ice.

Forest and field and frozen lake, spruce and pine and an earth of snow.

No moon, no star, no gleam in the sky. No bird, no bear, no howl of the wolf. The scimitar swish of the knives of the sleigh, the spears and the arrows of the runners on ground. Like scythes of ghosts at work before dawn.

Sakkijarvi? So soon reached? This town is dead. The houses stand like shut-up boxes, the streets tremor and are surprised by travellers, the town sleeps like a family of gassed bumble bees. Yes, the town is dead, and each one in it! The horses snort and the sleigh slides through, off again into the frozen night, into this icy hell to Viborg.

Who cares if the little bundle in the back lives or dies? This, its reception committee in this world: a mother who casts it out: a father who is determined only to be shot of it as one might be determined to be shot of leprosy: two wild horses, a swaying sledge, ten million pine trees, black ebony above, pearl white beneath, and around a cold so eating fierce that it defies any living cell to live within it. All that . . . and a silence like the knell of death.

The sledge chases into a skid on a hill. It charges down a deeply worn ski-track. A chasm on one side. The iced road on the other. On the edge, the razor edge . . . ten, twenty, thirty yards . . . Will it never right itself? And there, at the foot, at the level-crossing, yes there the Leningrad-Helsinki night-train elbowing

its way towards them like a snaky glow-worm, approaching them and signalling a How d'you Do with its ghoul white pocket handkerchief from its funnel. Forty yards. On and down the sledge skids. Swaying in the feet deep rut. At the edge, the sabre edge . . . They are lowering the *schlagbaum* late at the level-crossing: the Prince fights with the horses. He can never pull them up in time: there is nothing but to give them rein and let them break into a gallop, then rush for it. Fifty yards. Sixty.

The Prince is alive now: this is his nectar, fighting fiercely—this his life.

Each puff of smoke from the train is like a werewolf let out to pasture on the wastes of the Arctic.

Down the *schlagbaum* lowers, slowly, slowly. Down the sledge flies. And blue sparks from the train on the iced lines spit up and fill the heaven from end to end. Suddenly the phantom white main of the train gushes out of the side of the hill and springs out upon them in an instant. The sledge tears under: the Prince ducks wildly: the sleeve of snow on the lowering beam scrapes off on his lowered spine. The horses gallop across the track as the nose of the screeching engine strains out to touch them. The fireman of the train has seen it all and is braking furiously. The frozen iron lines cannot hold the carriages. In hell's own fireworks, the whole train shivers like a current through a filament, writhes like a worm on a pin, then, by itself, the last coach, hanging like a splinter of lightning, quivers, then slashes itself like a sledge-hammer against the opposite bank.

The sleigh is through, but the beam being lowered on the opposite side the Prince has reined his charges viciously round and by a miracle on the part of the Prince and by the horses themselves they are halted, imprisoned as it were between the tracks, and the

sledge has kept balancing.

Twelve were killed. And many injured. The Prince was asked to rush two small children quickly into Viborg and to leave them, until the police contacted them, at Fru Svendahl's Institution.

That was the establishment he himself was seeking.

He places them on each side of his own and drives on in.

2

FRU SVENDAHL's Institution was grey and built like a fortress. It stood waist-deep in a desert of snow. The Prince rang furiously at the bell till at last an old head appeared at a window. No, Fru Svendahl could not be disturbed so late at night and the Prince must leave his charges and return next day.

Fru Svendahl received him next evening in a library like an inner fortress. And she looked like the inner Head of an inner fortress. A great polyp in black sitting writing at a desk. Eventually her head raised. There was no glimmer of movement from any part of her body. She had a face like the underside of a skate. When that skate-like mouth opened it croaked in a flinty way. The Prince could not but reflect that he was pleased it was his daughter he was leaving there and not himself.

“Good evening,” said the Prince. That face intrigued him. It was puffing out now, like a pumpkin. It had little pin-point eyes, like stilettos. There was a marrow he had seen once . . . a turnip he had seen once . . . enough to drive a man homosexual, a face like that . . . “My business is delicate,” he said getting no good-evening from the papier-maché pulp in front

of him, "but then I suppose all your business that comes here is delicate . . ."

"You brought three children here," croaked the frog. The Prince wondered if sometimes God made a thousand people then made one extra with the silt that was left, and this was it.

"Not three children, certainly not! Only one was mine. The police were to contact you about the other two . . . I am a man, but not such a man, my good Fru Svendahl." Yes, he'd much rather be a homosexual if this was all women could offer. Like glue, bubbles and blubber all mashed up together.

"There was an accident at—is it on the Hamina road crossing?—last night," asked the Prince stalking up and down, then went on, "I was asked to bring the other two children down—for mercy's sake . . ."

"For mercy's sake," repeated the pencil-point eyes. Pin-point though they were they still went blunted and dead at the tips. The Muir glacier moves an inch in twenty minutes; the Prince wondered how it'd get on in a race with this old bog.

"But it's the third child, the little baby I wanted to see you about."

"You want your child left with us?" came the croak.

"Yes, that is it. I have heard you exist for just that very thing. The law that prevents the destruction of the unwanted in this world at least, I'm sure, supplies a fat living for you. The police have contacted you about the other two?"

"Yes. They are English. They are provided for."

"Then let us get to the business of my own troubling you, my good Fru Svendahl," expanded the Prince. What slime and tallow were in that form. What bitumen was in that dress. Running alive with slippery . . . "I am a man of very vast means," he rushed on. "I have—to put it mildly—tripped up. I am willing

to pay, and to pay high—as I am quite sure your prices are not thistledown. But, Fru Svendahl, this is no bastard, this child. Its mother—my wife—will not own it, and I prefer not to be saddled with it. They are the concrete facts and I will burden you with no sentimentality. I have heard that you help in these matters—at your own figure quite naturally: and I'm sure I am eternally grateful and will meet your prices."

"Your name?"

"My name? No, no! there are to be no names in this. That is the whole idea . . ."

"This is not a charitable institution," said the beady-eyed potato. "Your name will be privately guarded by myself. Without your name and the name of your bankers and your lawyers with whom I can arrange this, it is good-day."

This polyp reminded the Prince of the queen white ant who never stirred and so in the end is unable to stir at all, yet will be fed, and is queen and master, yes, even over millions.

"My name is Herr Gunnar Dahlgren," he said.

"It is not." And the fixture at the desk bent down to her writing.

"My name is Prince Sh——," he said, feebly for him. "I suppose we all have to pay for our sins . . . or our pleasures . . . in this case a drunken night after a feast when I even thought my wife attractive again. Well, I'll pay. I'm rich. I realise your price is a stiff one, Fru Svendahl. But you can ask it. My bankers you want? The Scandinavian Bank in Helsinki, Stockholm and Paris. My lawyers you want? Take it through Sundgren and Sundgren of Stockholm. I will see that a representative comes to see you. I understand your precautions," he added. "Huh! Twenty minutes worth of debauch and all this round my head, Fru Svendahl."

“We have grades of payment,” said the tub of tar.

“But the best, the best. Only the best. I have no care for money. The best for the brat, I beg you.”

“We find that all are only too anxious to begin paying,” said Fru Svendahl, “and we find that none are anxious to continue. We retain a child in our contract until they are twenty-one, but as soon as payments stop, they’re put out immediately.”

“I’ll pay, I’ll pay. Until twenty-one? Certainly. And afterwards too, I’ll see to that.”

What time would Sabina go out? He mustn’t miss her. Satan djärlar, those legs!

“What name is your child to have?” asked the woman.

“Name? Oh yes, name.” He scratched his head. “Call her Dahlgren. Oh no, Michelet: that’s an international name, call her Michelet.”

“Michelet. And Christian name?”

“Christian name? Sabina. No, Frieda. No . . . call her Kari.* I knew a devil of a woman once called Kari.”

“Kari. Michelet.”

“Ha! but this is wonderful!” cried the Prince. “I feel, my good Fru Svendahl, as if we were creating someone and not God. Why, we could call her anything we like. Say she’s from anywhere. Just imagine . . .”

“Imagine,” came the croak.

The whole full time he had spoken with her, her body had not moved once. Suddenly he felt that Fru Svendahl was bitter against all the parents who brought these offerings to her and gave her her fat livelihood. Perhaps she was a foundling herself? Hers was not an unkind face, the Prince saw that. Just someone no one would ever get the better of. Wet

* Kari. The “a” in Kari is long as in “star”.

cement and humourless and about as pretty as something the cat dragged in: but not inhuman.

There was a knock at the door and a younger woman, also of unsmiling mien, entered.

"This is my assistant," offered Fru Svendahl. "Martina, this is Herr Michelet."

They nodded, but neither said a word.

"Martina," continued the stolid mass, "you're leaving for the town now?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Then you had better know this first. The two boys who came last night with this little baby girl, were taken off a train crash and brought here in case their parents survived. Their parents did not survive. The children are English. When you return from the town tomorrow you will take the younger, who is months' old only, Mark Johnstone Wilde by name, to the British Consulate at Helsinki. He is to be adopted by an aunt in England. The elder, Roland Johnstone Wilde, aged four, is to be adopted by another aunt in Paris, but is to stay with us for some while until that lady can take him. The little baby is Kari Michelet. See before you go now that Nurse Heglund is sent in to attend her. Where is the child now?"

"In between the other two in the other room, Madame. They're still in the same cot together. I fear the little boys aren't well, but Dr. Jarnefelt says it is nothing and will pass."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the Prince. "That's our blooded daughter! Between two brothers already! What a girl! What a girl!"

"Do you want to see the little child once more?" asked the immovable bulk, turning her beady eyes on the Prince.

"See her? No, no, I don't want to see her. Sabina, she is the one I want to see!"

PART II

I

Twenty-one years later.

‘MARRIED Kari Michelet yesterday stop coming to England today to live stop come and meet us tonight John’s Hotel Jermyn Street stop what do you look like more handsome than me I hope Roland.’

Mark stood there holding his telegram.

He was late.

But he had something to attend to.

He never could escape it.

Into Mark’s house some years ago had come, no one knew from where, a young being, no one knew how young, born in some nearby town or ditch, no one knew which. It was this being that had to be attended to. It had ginger fur and beautiful white markings with a frothy, foaming woolly ruff tumbling like a bubbling waterfall from his neck to his stomach. His name was Whisky.

But Mark had a difficult character. He was proud the wrong way round. He thought there was something right about the poor man and the bicycle and the humble and the unlucky, and something wrong about the rich, the car, the highly-placed and the fortunate. True, Whisky had arrived as an unwanted and a mongrel and they were two good entrance tickets to Mark’s affection: but Whisky was so out-

rageously handsome. Winning he was, surcharged with activity and pounding heart; love he had to a degree that no human reaches: yet, there he was, beautiful as sunshine, and Mark felt the whole set-up phoney. He didn't believe the friendship of the dog: he saw cunning in his everything. Mark was a damn fool. But then . . . Whisky . . . friend for life with anyone after a thirty seconds' meeting, jumping up and over, kissing and playing with them all . . . Whisky . . . he ran by Mark on his cycle, he welcomed Mark home till home meant a welcome, he jumped up and down him every morning . . . but it was the tennis balls! the tennis balls that did it! Mark, still at his age, never moved without a ball in his pocket. He kicked it down streets, against walls, ever in the playground, and cared no hang what anyone said as long as only he could improve his football. One day Whisky suddenly had jumped in and away with it. Mark fetched another and Whisky had that too. So Mark ran back to the unguarded one and dribbled it against Whisky until he had lost it. This went on for hours. Then Whisky, who was a Stanley Matthews from his first moment, and he, went off for spells together all over the golf links. Crowds stopped in their Sunday walks to watch this six foot, long haired, thin as a piano-wire loon, merry as heaven with his four-legged sparkler. Then Mark might throw a ball twenty yards, Whisky would wait, run perhaps, or dive perhaps, and catch it in his teeth in mid-air. Thirty, forty yards. Like a cricketer. Though to Mark it was always like a goalkeeper.

So finally Whisky went right into Mark's heart.

Having done so, this happened: Mark was furious with anyone who taught Whisky a trick, who dared ask him to beg, who kept him from frolicking or what-you-will with other dogs. If Mark and Whisky were

friends, they were equals. They couldn't talk; more's the pity. Mark would no more have Whisky doing nonsensical 'human' actions, than he would have himself doing 'doggy' things. Whisky must never beg: why should he? Would a human beg of Whisky?

Mark holding the telegram stooped down and told his dog: "This is crazy. Never had a line from Roland since I left him when I was two months old. Have to go and meet him tonight. Says he married a Kari Michel yesterday. Who the hell's she? Like as if we were all life-long acquaintances."

The dog wagged his tail, barked once, licked Mark's face, and pinched the telegram.

"Here! . . ." But the dog had gone. On the cliffs with the telegram. Wagging his tail and dodging even through Mark's very arms.

Then they got in a huddle and went roly-poly down the cliffs together.

"Whisky," said Mark angrily as they finished, the dog staring twelve inches from his eyes, "I had thought about bringing you here, but I'm late! What the devil are you doing bringing me on the cliffs at this hour? There's a new law at school. Ten sharp. Or out altogether."

Whisky tried to remind him that it was also a law of Aunt Mabel's that he should be given a walk each morning before school.

"Whisky, I haven't even kissed a girl yet, and here's Roland going to *live* with one. A Kari something. It's a shock, Whisky. I don't know why, but I feel it has blown a wind across the *prow* of my ship. I had had it all planned: three weeks, then hitch-hiking in Italy; then all that mad swotting for these terrible examinations: then one week later, off on that six months

mucking-about exploration-do to Greenland—if they will take me—as they say they will. Then poor bloomin' Mark will have to go into a poor bloomin' office. There it is: all worked out so neatly and peacefully and here comes Roland charging in and chucking a something. I can't quite explain across the prow from Paris."

And the dog gave one single bark again..

"Whisky," continued Mark, "Pills has let me have both his Wembley Cup Final tickets for Saturday, because now he can't go. I think I'll ask Roland to go with me, shall I? That would be a fine start to brotherly love, wouldn't it?" Whisky bent his head at an angle. "If only you could follow football like you play it, Whisky," said Mark, "I think you really ought to go instead of any of us, don't you?"

And still once more the dog gave one short sharp bark. Mark had meant to smile, but the dog's face arrested him. Mark knit his forehead. The dog had strained his head right over to one side: he looked so sad, and so like an old time philosopher.

And so damn handsome!

"Christ! I wish we could speak!" cried Mark.

And the dog knit his brows and shook his cocked-over head.

Mark said "What an extraordinary amount of hair you have on your chest. Like a ruffled evening-dress shirt front." Mark played with it. He didn't stroke dogs. But he did ruffle their hair at times.

"You are a happy fellow but you never really laugh, do you?" asked Mark. And the dog sprang at Mark, then stared closely into his eyes, only inches away.

"You terrify me!!" cried Mark. "Are you human or what? I can't stand it!!"

And he jumped up and set off quickly, alone along the cliff back home.

Then he turned and picked up the following quadruped and pressed face against face.

"Long live sentiment. Boyoboy, I like warm things. And you Whisky!"

2

WE CAN hold back not one second longer! . . . Kari Michelē was a freak of nature. Some chemical fat and acid processes had acted in her skin to make her luscious and voluptuous beyond endurance. Sick soft: to see her was to liquefy, to be touched by her was to be begotten with St. Vitus Dance. As flaccid as a slug, as milky as Arabian silk: it was as if all the butters and fruits she had ever eaten had merely pushed their essence to her skin and had sat there oozing mush and oil.

No wife even, no child, no grandfather even, was unaware of it. As she came down the streets wives clutched their husbands as with handcuffs, something stirred for the first time in the breasts of children, and grandpapa threw away his crutch and did a jig.

Her face was an assembly of ovals and eggs. There was the oval of her chin and the ellipse of her forehead, the high Mongolian cheek bones like mangos standing, her eyebrows domed like sea shells, her lips like pouting asps, her eyes like moist green grapes. There was no point of her head or body which knew anything but roundness. If you think of a small white pig, a well-fed serpent, or a slug, you think of Kari. But with this: a miracle had fused her. Down to her utter irsteps, arched like the back of soft snails, she was as sleek as a July peach, as a Paris-bedecked young python. Boneless. A vertigo of sensuousness. And with every trick as well that scents and boudoirs knew.

She was a freak in history. For whatever this

chemical process in her was that layered her skin with this svelte and satin ooze, it has never been seen before; and we cannot hope that it will ever be seen again: for to see it was to be besotted for life. Silky. She left a trail behind as though an animal had passed.

There was quicksilver glistening in her gold fair hair, there was blood in the warmth in the down of her lips, there was milk in her pug, pudge hands and water in every move she made.

Her golden fair hair was softer than the dust of roses, her touch more suède than leopards'. Her lips were pouting like rose-buds drowned in nectar, her nails were tunnels ending in stilettos.

Though nothing in the oceans is as potent as ambergris, and though nothing on the lands is as potent as musk, we doubt whether there has ever been any single thing between this heaven and earth truly quite as potent as the voluptuousness of this our Kari.

One month before Mark had received his telegram Kari had been sitting in a boulevard in the twilight in Paris when his brother, Roland, hurrying by with flowers, nearly tripped over himself, and, gathering a courage he had never known before, he had come back to sit down beside her.

"Exs . . . scuse me, are you free? I mean . . . can I . . . speak . . . with you? I know it's rude and . . ."

Kari said nothing.

"I suppose it is awfully rude, I'm sorry," the young Roland spluttered. "As a matter of fact, I am on the way to the hospital to see my wife: we've just had a child, a tiny little boy called Pierre, so I really shouldn't have stopped . . . only you're so shockingly attractive . . . I've never seen anything like it. It's a miracle! Please excuse me . . ."

Kari said nothing.

"I suppose it's wrong," he went on, "but, but I couldn't see you tomorrow night could I?"

"Go and see your *silly* wife and *precious* little Pierre," she said.

"O dear, can't I, can't I, possibly see you just, just for a very short time tomorrow night?"

Kari said nothing.

"Then the night after perhaps? . . . or if I could get free tomorrow afternoon just for a little? My wife won't be out for a few weeks yet: though I shouldn't say that I suppose."

Kari said nothing.

"O dear, then when, when? O, I must see you, else I'll go crazy."

"Take me out to dinner. Immediately."

"But, but my wife? Another time, another time please?"

"Immediately!"

Roland had meant to go, tried, wrestled with himself . . . "Surely another time please?" he asked.

She did not answer any more. She lifted one leg over the other, and it ticked like a clock. The haze of the hose: the needle of the heel.

"Oh dear," he said. "Well I must be crazy: let's go, eh? . . . oh but look, if I could meet you in just two hours? . . . "

Her heel ticked on.

"Oh: then maybe I can still be at the hospital before they close at ten, eh?"

She did not answer. They rose to go.

"Where shall we go, you most wonderful of creatures? To the Muscatel?"

"How old is your precious little Pierre?"

"Only a few days, I'm afraid," he said leading her towards the Muscatel. "Look, these flowers were for

my wife Jeanne. I suppose this is a very bad thing I'm doing; but I must say you are the most wonderful person that ever existed! Have you always lived in Paris?"

"Is your silly Jeanne-Weenie handsome?" she purred.

"Oh, Jeanne? Oh dear, let's not talk about her, you keep on reminding me of what a bad chap I am. Jeanne? Yes, as a matter of fact she is handsome."

"Have you loved her long?"

"I suppose about four years . . . May I take your arm?"

She said nothing, but he took her arm and she dug her tiger talons into his flesh.

"Such bad things are going on now," he said, trying to be bright. "I'll have to set my head working on this to square this one up, won't I? Are you very hungry young lady?"

"Does she love you much?" Kari asked.

"Oh; yes: very, very much . . . I've never done anything . . . outside as it were . . . till now. Did anyone ever tell you . . . about yourself? . . . I mean, write poems and that? I'd like to write poems about you. Will you take these flowers? I perhaps can take my Jeanne some tomorrow: I must think of something to say to-night. Your eyes have the green of emeralds in them: and . . . is it yellow there too? I can just see them even in this light. Your hand is so cold, although it's very soft as well. Is it always like that?"

Kari said nothing.

"It's rather fantastic in a way . . ." he went on, "but you leave me . . . sort of destroyed . . . quite honestly you do. It seems to me that I am losing all my senses to-night. Pheel!"

At the Muscatel she ordered a meal complete with liqueurs, and Roland had to dip very deeply into his

pockets: but anything was worth anything that night. Bad chap he was; swept almost to insanity with this fatty, purring, cat-tiger before him.

"If I went in by a warm hearth, and there snuggled up before the fire the cat had become a tiger, that would be you," he said.

He should have had more will-power, but he had to admit again that this was happening to him now was everything we came on earth for, *this* he would remember: call the count afterwards if you must but he would not miss a moment now for all the wives or infants . . . what was he saying? He put his hand across his forehead. But yes, it was true.

"Yes, it's true," he said. He nearly cried, so mixed up he was inside.

"Oh here, I say it's nearly ten! I must go quickly. I must, I must . . ."

Kari said nothing.

She did not stop him.

"O dear, O dear, I'm mad, I'm mad!" he blurted. "What are you? Who are you? Golly, how I burn to be part in you: I am afire, afire, and only you can put it out. And I doubt whether even you can. Do you scorch out a fresh skull every night?"

"Will silly Jeannie-Weenie go to sleep when they put the lights out at ten," she asked; "or will she lie awake and think of wonderful you?"

"Stop it! Always reminding me about Jeanne. I wish I had never met you! I will never be quiet again."

Her eyes were getting a little live jaundice to them.

"What is your name?" he asked.

She did not answer.

"You won't tell me your name? But why not?" he asked.

She did not answer.

“But then how can I see you again?” he nearly shouted. “And I must, I must! I am sorry, but I just must, I’ll go quite off my head if I don’t. I’m afraid you have entered bang into my life, and I won’t be able to get you out now, never.”

“Get some cigarettes. Immediately!” Her voice was harder, higher pitched, ‘commoner’.

They left to walk to her room. She lived very near. She told him to tread on those flowers and throw them away, she didn’t want another silly woman’s flowers. He did and left them in a bin he passed. He was twenty-five and for twenty-five years he had been a smiling fellow in spite of the War and all the hiding in the Occupation and all its hardships, but the smile had left him now. Yet . . . he had never lived as he was alive at this instant: he had never known the cells in him to hold such bubbling as flowed in him now: he felt twenty times a man yet at the same time bereft of manly strength, he felt . . . that these hours were his whole life to him. Inside her room he stood petrified, numbed, hypnotized by his own horrible actions. She went elsewhere and coming back with one hand behind her said:

“Now, mm’mm, would you like me to give you a present for your silly wife and precious little Pierre, mm’mm?”

“Eh?”

“Something you can show them all your life, something you can explain in your own imbecile way, eh? Would you like a little present, mm’mm?”

“Yes . . . well . . .”

“Then show them this!” And she lashed him with a metalled barbed whip and the blood spouted from a three inch gash and lights burned in her dung-pit sockets and he fled headlong out of the room and a devilish little giggle like a laugh in hell followed down

the stairway and the snaky thong of the whip hanging there in her pudgy hand.

3

Yes, Mark was late.

Down the lime-tree'd drive, down the cliffs, down the rut cut tram-lines, he hurtled his cycle down to school like a javelin being chucked at it.

Kari Michelet? Who was Kari Michelet? And his brother had married her? And coming to England tonight? Marrying! Why Mark hadn't hugged a girl yet.

Wow! that tram! Nearly knocked it down. Could he get between two tram cars passing? He had often wondered that. Flashing by. Staring down at his telegram; ". . . what do you look like more handsome than me I hope Roland."

Yes, what did he look like—Roland? . . . O dear, he should be careful, that was a baby in a pram.

Straight as an arrow, straight like a lightning flash, headlong through the crowding streets of Clucktown to his Institute of Architecture, his School.

Yes, and what did she look like—Kari Michelet? Like Iris? No, he hadn't kissed Iris yet. He had pursued her for two years. She was in the School of Arts which shared their building. "Hallo Iris," he would say blushing. And "O hallo, Mark," she would answer. He couldn't stand the pounding of his heart and went on, on his way. His way? In a circle back to those incredible saucers of Arctic water that Iris had stolen or eyes. Past the corridors where she was working, pounding the pavements near her home, hugging arcades where she would wander gushing with her giggly gullible friends. "Hallo Iris," he would venture once more. "O hallo, Mark." And off on his

circle again. Back to her. Every night he lectured himself in the mirror "Iris gives you every opening: take them, you sis. foot mash of mush. Kick yourself silly: but Speak!"

And here was his brother marrying! Going to *live* with a Kari Michelet!

Mark skidded round a baker's van and nearly knocked Pills Havoc for a sixer.

"Here give us a lift!" shouted Pills—figure like a barrel, "We're late."

Pills Havoc was a dapper, flashy, cocky mongrel of a fellow, quick as quicksilver, light as lightning, with a face like the title page for a volume on zest. He was called 'Pills' because he bounced so. His goal? To pass his examinations, to have a fine architect's practice and to marry the fair Phoebe. And the fair Phoebe had accepted him . . . if he passed his examination.

One minute to ten: they were at the school: they sprang to the ground and dashed on in.

Iris was by the door.

"Hallo Iris."

"O hallo . . ." But Mark had fled and Pills with him.

A lily of a woman that Iris, Mark thought. Captain of the school at hockey, tennis, everything. The just pride of the school. Crisp sometimes, then as winning and as seductive as a fresh flower: but sluttish sometimes, then as crumpled and bedraggled as a dank one.

In they went with a second to spare.

"You're late!" barked Quarrel.

4

"YOU'RE LATE!" barked Quarrel again.

"There's a second to spare," said ~~Mark~~

"Not by my watch there isn't!" shouted Quarrel.
(He could only shout: even if he whispered he shouted.)

"Then where's Mathiestone-Pride?" asked Pills.

"He isn't here."

"No one seems to be here," said Mark looking round. "Where's Tiny?"

"Tiny isn't here. Still having his breakfast I'll be bound." Quarrel was a hammered-down squidgy student and his voice was like shooting-popcorn with a pistol behind it. He always went to London on Wednesday afternoons and this afternoon Mark would now be joining him when he went up to meet his brother and this Kari lady.

And Flash Rod whirwinded in. Roderick was a South African, only over to take his examinations, called Flash because he did. Six foot and more, but as inaccessible as the cliff he stood as, he spoke little, and behaved with the pride of a mulatto in a negro congregation. Neither Clucktown nor England meant anything to him and he lived his daydreams in Durban and his nightdreams in London, where he lived, making the sixty minute journey back and forth each day. He whirled past Quarrel and asked as he went to his board:

"What are you doing, Quarrel?"

"Making notes of the times everyone comes in!"

Flash began working. It can be said that he alone ever seriously worked. He continued his drawing. A hum seemed to be in him: you felt he was friendly: but it just never oozed out. And if you went after his hum or himself, neither somehow seemed there.

Larry was in the room. In conversation with Mark. Larry was the Don Juan of the class. His victories were gained by go-ahead methods which all envied. If he wished to speak with a girl in the school, or walk

home with her: he spoke to her. Most extraordinary. And the girls liked it and fought and manoeuvred for positioning at the school gates where he might . . . “Hallo Boris, coming up my way?”

Mark decided Roland must be like Larry.

There was Tiny! Everyone jumped up to look out at him. A bent dinosaur of a youth, droll as droll, on a cycle the size of a pip, and with a squashed trilby tumbling over his forehead half blotting out his eyes. He had to stick his knees out sideways, as his lathed gangleshank legs couldn't be used up any other way. Beside him, Flash Rod and Mark were short. But hitting so many door-heads in his lifetime had made him stoop over like an elongated corpse—for gaunt he was—and he was now pouring out over his bicycle like a tired fuchsia; he hung out and down everywhere, then out and down again. As long indeed as the moon's reflection on the water, and twice as wan.

“I suppose he thinks he's hurrying!” jabbed Quarrel.

And in came Tiny. Banging his head on the door-piece.

“Ouch! . . .” he began.

“Now, now, no swearing!” cried Pills laughing. “I always wait for you to do that Tiny, ol' chap. You ought to be used to it by now: you'll knock it down one day. Ha!”

And the skyscraper like a lank shadow, came in, holding his head. “Where's Mathiestone Pride?” he asked.

“Yes, where *is* he?” Quarrel went off again. “And what time d'you think this is? You're late!”

Tiny Dukeson sniffed past him. He would not deign to converse with that . . . pea in a bladder. Tiny went to rest his chin on one hand on his desk where he would sit for hours unmoving, while with the other hand he scratched out esquisses.

Quarrel came right up underneath his nose in front of him.

“You’re late!” he hissed.

“O go away,” said the other.

But then that was Quarrel and Tiny. The one ever hissing and the other ever saying “O go away.” They always went about together like an exclamation mark and its dot and were just as complementary to each other. Where Tiny went, Quarrel seemed attached. He hissed or barked and Tiny ever tried to shake him off. They have contradicted each other from the day that they met until now, yet love each other as dearly as that love of brothers that never professes itself.

“My brother’s coming to England tonight to live,” called Mark from by the window. “And bringing a French wife with him. At least, I suppose she’s French.”

“Ah, may she do us good,” called Tiny, his hand and chin still unmoving, and his mouth opening from above them.

“What’s that?” thrust Quarrel. “I thought Mark said she was married? We’ll have no promiscuity here, I’ll have you know, Tiny Dukeson.”

And Mathiestone Pride appeared at the end of the street. Mark saw him and Quarrel tore over to join the window gang, angry not to have seen him first. “There, Tiny, nearly missed him because of you and your promiscuity!” Poor man: after three years with students who nonchalantly strolled in each morning at any time between nine and one, Mathiestone Pride had with iron vigour made this ten o’clock law, little dreaming that his lackadaisical students had worn him out of morning punctuality as the sea in time will wear down a rock past all building up again. Hand on a pork-pie hat and his other clutching at his heart, he was tumbling one leg over the other, steaming along

like a kettle boiling over, helter skeltering down the road, trying with the desperation of a commando to retain all that dignity that he alone in the whole of Clucktown could truly boast of.

“Must change this new rule somehow,” he mumbled.

Tiny said he wouldn’t have missed this sight for the world.

“You nearly did!” barked Quarrel.

Professor Emmanuel Montague Mathiestone Pride tumbled into school as if the devil was after him:

5

MARK and Quarrel met that afternoon on the station and journeyed up to London together.

The train sped into the City and the two students separated: Quarrel to visit some cousins he doted on and Mark to watch the Arsenal in a mid-week football match.

Coming back from the Arsenal Mark found himself in Soho with some hours yet to spare.

He walked about feeling very brave. This is where the gangsters come from.

Standing at the corner of Soho Square was a woman of thirty to forty in a blouse of heavy satin, like hazed silver, like a blue mirror, with a thousand spears of lightning flashing down and across it in the folds. Her face was pinched and hard. Almost a concentration-camp face, so drawn it was. But the eyes stared like two black holes. Mark had never had intercourse

“Hello, dearie. Are you coming back with me?”

He went towards her.

(He often thought afterwards, he was not an impulsive person, he acted at such short notice in this: why did he not go down to Piccadilly and select the finest? It was moments only between the idea entering

his head and the act.)

"Er, yes," he said smiling, "but I'm afraid I haven't much money."

"Two pounds, dearie: you've got two pounds haven't you?"

"No, oh no, I haven't. I see, I didn't think it would be like that, I'm sorry."

"How much have you got? Not a penny less than a pound, dearie: that wouldn't do."

"Oh I see. You see I don't live in London. I have to keep some for going home. But I'll look, shall I?"

"Yes, see."

And he looked. And he found twenty-seven shillings and she said "Come along." She wouldn't be losing anyone at this time, anyhow.

So he went.

She asked for a pound, she couldn't take less, but he had explained . . . "A pound!" she insisted. He was sorry to have this experience soiled by this bickering. He gave a pound.

She never believed that he hadn't been with anyone before, that he was so entirely innocent. Ignorant. She was not very kind about it.

In a quarter of an hour he found himself back again on the same street corner on which he had picked her up. She had given him two shillings back at the last second.

"So that's what it all is?" he paused, looking back at the house, and ruminating. "That's the great thing, the great wonder is it? Well, well, well: I don't think much of it. What an oddity to make all that song about it that they do in this world. No, I don't think much of it. But, but one thing has happened: now I am a man. I feel it absolutely. And before I wasn't. Like at the New Year: at fifteen minutes to twelve you think, it is one year and at fifteen minutes past it is *irrevocably*

another: and the first can *never* be again. So fifteen minutes ago I was not a man and now I am. Irrevocably. And I can never be a boy again. Yes, something has happened: I am different: I am a Man, complete, grown . . . how pleasant."

And he went to look for a café, and felt . . . complete.

He went upstairs at the Tottenham Court Road Corner House, and there, sat down by Quarrel!

"Well I'm dashed!" cried Quarrel.

"So am I!" said Mark. "How are you? Have you had a good day?"

"O, I don't know," grunted Quarrel. "I've been to my cousins. They have a most wonderful little boy, Tommie, the most fantastic that I've ever met. And they're so proud of him too; I'm sure they'll spoil him. He's only six. He's sure to be a prodigy at something."

The orchestra played their sugar-sweet music. Mark was the happiest of people.

"You come along too to meet my brother," he said to Quarrel, not meaning it and hoping exceedingly that Quarrel wouldn't say yes.

They hummed and ha'd. Mark hoped that Quarrel would say no, and he did, hoping Mark would press him. And Mark did, still hoping Quarrel would stand out and say no. So it continued, till suddenly to Mark's horror Quarrel gave in and said yes. Whereupon Mark struck up "If it's difficult: you mustn't bother. You mustn't trouble at all . . ."

"Yes, yes, I'll come." And Quarrel did.

Off on a bus they went together: a 19 bus to Piccadilly. They got on it going the wrong way and had to get off at Southampton Row and go back correctly. They were both happy.

The fantastic moment drew near.

"I went with a lady of the town," said Mark..

"You *what?*" upheaved Quarrel.

"Yes. Not such a very nice one, I must say."

Quarrel was staggered. Very interested. And until he had got his mind adjusted, horrified. He would never have done such a thing. But he was impressed: definitely: and Mark went up in his estimation and not down, because of it. He listened as one with a wide mouth to a pioneer. And Mark became from then onwards, in Quarrel's mind, a pioneer.

6

THE two students mounted two flights of stairs, rang a bell, and Mark stood in an over-excited brim-top bubbling state. A youth like the cream scraped off the top of the milk, came to the door.

"Roland?"

"Mark?"

And it was they! The two brothers.

In the first flash of a second when so much is seen, they were both shocked. They had not expected this. Two men less similar could not be imagined and both had all this time decided his brother must be his counterpart. Quarrel also was taken aback, but pleasantly so, for all the uncouthness which was the worst side of his friend was absent in this brother. Cream silk shirt. Fawn gabardine summer suiting, groomed to the tips of his finger-nails. A fat wad of a bandage round his neck seeming to continue a gash from across his face: what was it? But as wide a difference in the two as if a prairie had knocked at the door to say How-d'you-do to a scent-shop. Mark felt less-than his brother; as many a prairie man would feel knocking at the door of a scent-shop. But these prairie men have their own pride: they just get caught

out of place sometimes, that's all.

They went inside. Much the same height, with Mark a little ^{the} taller.

"Well I never!" said one.

"Well I never indeed!" said the other.

"And the last time we met was in Finland! You have changed! I never imagined you like this!"

"No," said Mark, very shy. "Well O well O well." And he couldn't say anything else for a time. "O this is Geof. Quarrel," he added. "I hope you don't mind. He's in London also today. He's from our school."

"No, delighted, I'm sure. Come in. I'll get some sherry."

Sherry? Yes, that's different. It wouldn't be sherry in Mark's house, not like that, 'I'll get some sherry,' not like that. No, no. Not at all.

Mark raised his eye-brows in thick thought, and breathed out heavily. Quarrel thought he would like this brother: obviously refined, obviously the king of perfect manners and immaculate taste. What a shock for Mark to have that for a brother! Mark could see that his brother was friendly and liked that. Roland, retiring to the kitchen to fetch the glasses, was almost laughing: this was the kid brother, a country boor: to think that *he* might have been like that, had *he* been dossed out to Aunt Mabel: he'd have to be nice to him. He felt patronizing immediately. And kind he would be.

He went to the bedroom to fetch Kari. Kari said she would come in a minute.

"You'll see what he's like for yourself," said Roland, full of innuendo.

That she would. She wouldn't be asking this Roland for anyone's certificate.

It was a long time before Kari joined them. Roland and Quarrel had got exceedingly friendly in that time.

Quarrel was at his best when he felt he was speaking *up* to someone and he certainly felt in Roland a very superior man. French etiquette, he would know things like that. Quarrel had never been anywhere except Clucktown and London. Nothing in this world gave Quarrel quite as much thrill as saying "Yes sir." Mark said nothing, or next to nothing. He eyed his brother minutely. 'He looks a hundred in the get-up of twenty. His face is so old. It hasn't much light in it. This friendliness, this hail-brother-good-humour, that is on the surface.' He liked the surface of his brother. It mattered nothing if they were poles apart as long as they were friends. It was just the shock of having a picture in his mind all these years and then finding someone who had no connection with the picture at all. What *was* it behind Roland's eyes? There was something *behind* them.

Kari came in. And Quarrel went out. Out through the floor, all the way to damnation.

In rich taffeta she was. A sheaf skirt.

"Ah, this is Kari," said Roland rising. "Kari, here is my brother who got separated from me in a train smash more than twenty years ago."

"How are you?" said Kari, coming forward, in a voice with a little metallic stone in it. Kari had voices. She spoke French like another person from she who was now speaking English. German like another. And in each language she ranged from sensuously sickly honey to flint devoid of all the last traces of humanity. In this her normal English speaking voice there was metallic stone in it, and it was the least interesting of all her voices.

"How am I?" said Mark rising, smiling, "I am the happiest man in the world, and I live with the happiest dog in the world, called Whisky. Soon I will hitch-hike to Italy: then soon after that all we six

students who work together all sit for our most frightening examinations. Flash Rod must pass because he has a grandfather or'ly keeping alive a practice for him in South' Africa till he gets there; Pills must pass because Phoebe will not marry him unless he does; Larry must pass because his father's going to make him carry on his butcher's shop unless he does; Tiny must pass because he is a born architect; Geof. Quarrel here must pass because however God made him he himself has decided he is a born architect; and I must pass . . . because I loathe all work of any nature whatsoever "but have painstakingly decided I would hate, being an architect less than anything else. Did anyone else want to speak? But, very wonderful sister-in-law, you asked me how I am; see, I am answering you seriously, and how can I tell you in one minute when you do not know me? So I must tell you . . . Quarrel, sit, you look seedy . . . I must tell you that my Artful Dodger mind has already got myself taken on as one of the crew for a six months sail to Greenland before an office catches me, then . . ."

"And why Greenland?" asked Kari.

"Why not? Anywhere, anywhere. There! . . . " and he banged a paper lying open on the table: "Why won't they take me on on that? That would be even better fun."

"A windjammer?" said Roland, looking at the paper.

"They sail from Finland to Australia," said Mark. "And a hunk of history it would feel like being on one too! Kari, you're wonderful! Roland, you're wonderful! You are an agent for raw materials, you say? Sounds an odd, intriguing profession. How different you both are to all I know! How delicious to get into another world! Paris and Clucktown eh? But I love my cliffs. And Whisky. You must come and see them

both. Now Paris and cliffs and Whisky might make something. But if you haven't seen our hills and our estuary and the twinkliest quadruped alive . . . why, where's Paris without that? But seriously . . . you got the better of the set-ups, Roland. You can roll Clucktown up and chuck it in the sea, though nothing against Aunt Mabel mind you! How I envy you Paris. And a wife! How lucky to begin life early. Did anyone else want to speak? Let that teach you, good lady, *not* to ask a fellow how-do-you-do. And you must both come and see all my friends at our absurd school where this chap Geoffrey Quarrel also suffers." And he looked for Quarrel. Who took some finding, so absent he seemed to be. Quarrel had gone through the floor spiritually and, it would seem, physically. He hadn't been prepared for this. What *was* this Apparition of Miracle who had come before him? Quarrel did not know what he was saying while Kari stayed in the room. Everyone saw why, but he was so certain that they didn't. He just went phfft, shot, slugged, hot, cold . . . he jibbered and spluttered his conversation out with that exaggerated control of the complete drunk who is convinced he is talking complete sense.

But everyone was friendly already: the place glowed, generated life, smiles opened up like petals after night.

Mark saw this in Kari: how aware of herself she was. She forced herself to listen with exaggerated intensity and kept a speck behind her eyes worrying about her manicured plump and dimpled hands, her hair—twirling it gently here and there as if she had some fairy lice—her cigarette, tapping it—banging it to the ash-tray every second, touching her dress just ever so slightly and trying so hard to show she was thinking of nothing but what she was listening to: affecting naturalness so desperately that only affection stayed. 'The person dresses completely,' someone,

probably Oscar Wilde, has said, 'who can spend hours before a mirror and then go out and forget there is such a thing.' Mark will tell Kari that.

But then, Mark, we fear, noticed his sister-in-law but little.

"Roland, can I be honest?" asked Mark suddenly.

"Yes?" answered the brother.

"I want some tea. Won't you all have tea? But let me make it. I don't want to bother anyone, only tell me where the things are."

"Why of course."

Quarrel wouldn't have missed this evening for the world! He tried so desperately to impress: he must count these people among his very best friends: and they *must* meet his cousins and their miracle boy. He was already envisaging little Tommie meeting them: he was already telling the rest of the School . . . yes even they must all come up to meet these two . . . This Kari! . . .

"I suppose in Paris you don't have much tea?" That's the way he talked. Small talk. Full of warmth. Old friends with new friends right there on the dot of introduction. Always making bigger people than he, feel bigger people than he. The sort of a man to whom nothing on this earth quite equalled that thrill of licking shoes.

Mark was alone with Kari in the kitchen, and she was showing him the kettle, the cups . . . He said:

"Are you prudish?"

"No," she answered. He closed the door and came back half smiling: "You're quite sure you're not prudish, not even the tiniest bit?" he asked.

"No, not as far as I know," she said softly. "Why?"

"Well I'll tell you a very odd thing. You won't be disgusted, or angry for ever, or anything unhappy like that!"

“No.” They were very close to each other. He was speaking very softly, still with a light smile.

“I went with a woman tonight for the first time in my life.”

“How . . . how do you mean?” she said.

“Well . . . I’ve never been with one before . . . I think you understand.”

“Yes, perhaps I do,” she agreed. “And how did you enjoy it?”

“Greatly over-rated!” he said.

“Then perhaps the woman wasn’t good enough, Kari suggested.

“O a cake’s a cake and an apple’s an apple, all the world round, isn’t it?”

“I can’t tell you,” replied Kari. “You’ll have to find out by yourself, won’t you?”

“Ask me in ten years time,” said Mark. “But I’ll be very surprised, very surprised indeed, if the ‘thing’—if you understand me—isn’t greatly over-rated.”

And they returned to the other room and Quarrel was ever so attentive and Roland had a wry superior twinkle in his eye.

Mark then asked Roland if he would go to the Cup Final with him on Saturday. Roland excused himself saying he would have to be working on Saturday, but would Mark take Kari along? Mark as near as a hang said no: these tickets were scarce and the whole world screamed for them: Tiny had been the next on his list . . . He said weakly “ . . . if Kari would like to go.” And Kari said yes! Tiny would be furious. And Mark wasn’t in the least pleased either.

Mark went back to the kitchen to boil the water up again. While there he took out his mouth organ and played away: softly, but then loudly.

“O, there he goes,” said Quarrel: “he’s got a dozen

instruments at home. I wish he'd learn to play them."

Roland hardly thought an harmonica the height of music and sneered inside himself, but he found in spite of it he rather liked the noises coming from the other room.

"I can't believe . . . is that only an harmonica?" said Kari as it lapsed out like an orchestra.

"Let's go and listen closer," said Roland intrigued a little. And they went to the door of the kitchen. Mark was with his back to them, standing in front of the stove, stopping to sing a bar, then back to the harmonica banging an accompaniment with a knife on all the china lying around.

At the back of Kari's mind a little germ stirred: too bad to have to 'spoil' all this.

7

QUARREL talked of nothing else the whole journey home, Kari, Kari, Kari, and how goo-goo he had felt and how she oozed. He took it for granted that Mark felt the same and said 'we feel'. He talked of eyebrows like sea-shells of ivory, of cheek-bones from distant Mongolia, of cheeks like bright peaches, of hands like baby puffs with the claws of a tiger, of hair, the sweet fragrance of which would stay with him throughout his days, of a body wasped, hour-glassed, sending a screaming and a retching from his mind to his feet. How she had delicately tapped her cigarette ash to the tray (it had irritated Mark) how chill were her arctic water-green eyes with their come-to-bed beckon (Mark had found them a watered bile colour, empty and mainly dead); how full and outstanding was her instep like the curve of a wheel and her golden-red sheer-hosed legs . . . (Mark hadn't noticed her instep: he belonged to that lesser breed of men who

stare at a woman from the neck up) of her thoughtfulness and intelligence and fine breeding (she had scarcely uttered twenty words the whole evening . . .) how her flesh was wobbly, soft and malleable, shouting to be mauled (ugh!).

"In fact," concluded the gushing Geoffrey Quarrel sitting back in his corner, "I'm not at all sure that I'm glad you took me with you. How I'll pass my exam now I don't know. It's quite unsettled me, and stirred up the most unholy fires which are better left dead. That taffeta! That little tight sheaf skirt!"

What was this panegyric? It worried Mark. He thought he knew beauty when it passed him. Kari had been pleasant, but the amount of sex appeal she had registered on his thermometer had been minus. He was quite repulsed at the idea of contact with her. Intelligence? She looked dumb to him: broad-minded perhaps; but that would be Paris. He felt it all very definitely, and was alarmed that his friend went on like this. Quarrel would be writing sonnets in a minute.

Mark had that night become the first man in this world who at the first meeting with Kari had left her company immune.

"I had wanted to say," splashed on Quarrel, "that Kari is one in a million. But that's such a cheap phrase I cannot use it for her. Besides she is very far from being just one in a million. Very far indeed! She is quite definitely one out of all conceivable time: she's in a category of miracle absolutely that can only ever be known but once. The volcanoes, the lightning, the ambergris, the musk, the angels, the witches, must all have conspired together to make her . . . and they have left her . . . molten. I hope that's a good seat you've got for her for that Cup Final?"

"It isn't a seat at all," said Mark. "It's a standing place for 2s. 6d."

"Standing for 2s. 6d.?" asked Quarrel horrified.
"You're not to ask the poor girl to stand all that time?"

"She's bloody lucky to get in at all!" cried Mark.

"Yes, yes, I know," said Quarrel who hated football every bit as much as Mark loved it, "but she's a woman from Paris. She'll expect a pucker grandstand place . . . Suppose it rains, man?" he flashed.

"Then a 100,000 will get wet and she'll be one of them."

8

WHEN Mark knocked at the second floor hotel suite in Jermyn Street at twelve next Saturday there was no answer. He knocked louder and after the third attempt a foggy, froggy, groggy voice, with some cream and sleep in it, came to the door and said: "Oh hallo . . . it's you, is it?"

It was Kari.

Mark was upset and dumbfounded. ". . . Aren't you ready yet? We ought to be going."

"Mmmm? Come in." And her yawn poured out like treacle down a tunnel. "O dear, I'll get ready," and she patted a yawn at the opening of its cave.

Mark had asked her to be ready at twelve so that they could go and eat and then be early at the stadium. He was already regretting having agreed that she should come.

She disappeared to her bedroom and he called her out. She came, drooping her head over the door handle, her eyelids straining at her face like fly legs on a gooey paper, and a thick musk-like scent exuding from her. She had a long, oyster satin, heavy metallic gown on, running alive with liquidity, hissing and sludging, shshshsheeeeeee . . . ing along. She waited for what he was to say.

"I, er . . . I don't know how you feel about this: you see," he began, "it's not a pucker seat or anything. You'll have to stand up all the time you know?"

Like a sea around her, that gown.

"That's all right," she drawled.

"Then listen to me, sister-in-law!" Mark said expanding, "do me this favour: hurry like mad, as you never have before and as you may never need to do again."

Like the pearly wet sheen of the inside of a shell, that gown.

She gave a sensual hum-grunt for an answer. But yes, she would hurry! Which surprised her far more than it did him: for she had never intended to. She had never really hurried since, since? O dear . . . since? . . . why, she had never really hurried for anyone before.

"One second," he called once more.

Water runs over ice as the shine does over that gown.

"Mmm?" She was smiling. Look at his hair: all over the place! Look at his face: how boorish! Earthy: like a freshly ploughed field. But you could see right into it. That was the funny thing. How she was smiling. It didn't seem anything particular to him that a person should smile, but she hadn't smiled with quite that feeling since, since . . . since? . . . oh dear, since never in all her life before!

"I thought we might go to lunch first. Do you like the Corner House?"

The slightest move in that gown and lightning streaked down it.

"Anywhere," she said. What a boy. For two pins she'd start singing. She hadn't sung for . . . ooh . . . how long . . . ooh . . . how long? Why, never in all her life had she sung. Unless a hec-hee in hell is singing.

And the rustle of her satin giggled in a honey-giggle

back to its room, then swished suddenly right round and back . . . "There's some chicken in the frig if you'd like something to eat now, and . . ." then it squished and squelched and squidged and was off like radium having a game with mercury. She was going to ask him if he'd like to make a cup of tea; but she'd make it herself! Why not? Yes, she'd make *him* a cup of tea. And *never* . . .

And a bus coasted by down Piccadilly.

That was an odd bravery that had crept over Mark last night. He had written to Iris. Tired of pounding pavements, creeping up corridors, hanging round by the school gates, by her house . . . he had actually written to her. Now what would she answer?

No Kari would not wear black, milky blue or anything: it would be white to-day: crisp and white and light and bright: she *would* sing in a minute.

The hotel lay close opposite the blitzed church tower of St. James' and between the hotel and Piccadilly was the Ornamental Garden. And in the garden were thirteen plane trees and with these thirteen plane trees was one other. And no one knew what that other one was. A sculptured cloud wafted its way down Piccadilly. And on the canvas which filled the view from their windows the red buses went thithering and hithering by.

It was very difficult for Kari to hurry. She had never hurried: not even for a train that was leaving. She'd let it go: and also if hurrying meant doing a two-hour toilet in one hour that still might not be fast enough for that football madcap in the other room.

"Do you know anything about football?" Mark shouted out. Now if he's going to start talking during getting ready, that *will* delay things!

"I used to play it," she answered.

"You? Play?" What crazy-gang was this?

“Goalkeeper. And centre forward,” she answered.

“You?” he answered. “Whoever for?”

“I used to play with the boys. Some of them tried to stop me: but I played.”

There was a pause. “Kari,” he said near the door.

“Yes, Mark?”

“That fellow Quarrel,” said Mark, “is so outrageously moon-struck by you that he has never stopped talking about you for a minute anywhere, and everyone’s asking if they can meet you. Can they?”

“All right: if they won’t mind,” said she.

“They won’t mind: they’re all longing to. Could it be a Wednesday or a Saturday, they are our half days off at school?”

“It can be next Wednesday if you like,” she said.

“Then next Wednesday it shall be,” said he.

“Kari,” he said again.

“Yes, Mark?”

“Don’t you think my new sister-in-law is wonderful?”

“I don’t know,..Mark,” she said, “you’ll have to find out for yourself, won’t you?” Yes, she would sing! She tried a few notes of a French song.

“But that’s terrific!” came from the other side of the door. “Keep on, keep on. What a lovely voice you have!”

It wasn’t lovely, but it had something. He was in love with that voice: her speaking voice meant nothing. Brittle, and like stone too.

“Why is your singing voice so much more fruitful than your speaking voice?” he called.

She stopped what she was doing and put down her brush.

“Because there’s happiness in it,” she said.

“But you must always be happy you silly little thing!” he shouted. “In everything. In speaking too.”

She turned. The door was still closed. She looked towards it. If he only knew! The boy would have her crying next. Now she hadn't cried since, since . . . she had never cried. And never would! She looked determined.

"Kari."

"Yes, Mark?" She said it rather feebly.

"I hope I haven't said anything wrong, but you will continue to sing, won't you?"

"You haven't said anything wrong. In a minute, Mark." But soon he was calling out again.

"Kari."

"Yes, Mark?" She wished he'd go away.

"Do you sing all the time?"

She raised her head. She paused.

"I've never sung in all my life before," she answered.

9

If a book has a string on which its beads are threaded, here is the string.

When Kari was twelve Fru Svendahl moved her Institution to Paris.

Another girl fell in love with Kari and came every night to creep into her bed. Kari said she "must do things." And among the things she "must do" was to steal the files from Fru Svendahl's private safe.

The great time came and all one night Kari pored over the secret histories of the Institution's inmates. But first, herself . . .

And she learned the tale of the Hamina crossing, she learned that her father was Prince Sh——, that his lawyers were . . . that his bankers were . . . that the other two babies who had got blown in by fate to that horrible meeting were a Roland and a Mark Johnstone Wilde, that .

The thief was discovered putting the files back and dismissed forever. No threat, no punishment could draw a word from her. She was much more afraid of her beloved one than her masters. And out she went, and out also from Kari's memory as well.

And for weeks, Kari browsed and browsed. Mark, Roland and Prince Sh—— were her family. And until then she had never had a family. But now these three became her family very quickly. And Prince Sh—— was the father of them all. And Kari was the idol of them all, because she *knew* . . .

For hours and hours, for weeks and weeks, for months and months, and now for years and years she had browsed . . . till it seemed that Kari had only ever had one idea, to bring her family all together again at the Hamina crossing, and then . . .

It was not a thought as concisely put as this. It was thinking, thinking, round it, in it, with it. It had started out at her age of twelve so simply, and generated through a bog of thought through the later years that followed.

The things that happened to the three of them in her mind! From whipping their eyes out to mending their socks. But ever the one thing, the one real rod of iron in Kari's life, she *had* to get her family all together again at Hamina, and then . . .

She had tried to keep her power-mind right towards them but she was already 'master' of Roland: her instincts had just torn in upon her and the field of strife had been set, fought and won before she had even looked at the things in proper daylight.

No matter . . . to get them all there, that was the thing.

But always they must all love her: that had formulated very early in her mind and was a very steel fixture now. She was to be the idol of her family and

the only way she could think of being sure of that was to get each one to propose marriage to her . . . and he would be promised his answer at Hamina.

Roland was as good as there already . . . only one month after their chance-made meeting in a boulevard in Paris.

Prince Sh—— would arrive in England this very Cup Final night "for his first visit to us in twenty years" the *Tatler* had said, "and he has promised to attend," the notice went on, "The R-Reception which will only commence at 9.0." And there Kari must be this very evening. Her father!

She was proud as her great plot grew so quickly now to fruition. But how her family would be proud of her when they knew how she had knit them all together . . . three of whom had never known a family.

So the string to this tale is one of which only Kari knew, and which she thread all by herself. When all her beads were safely threaded on it she must take her handiwork and have it firmly clasped at Hamina. And then . . .

10

AFTER an hour Mark thought he had controlled himself magnificently and went to shout through the door again. But at that moment out came Kari saying "Haven't I been quick?"

This took the wind out of his sails, but he said a not angry "No."

This nearly took the smile out of *her* sails: she had never been so quick in her life, and all for him and his jolly old football.

"I'll just do my nails, and then I'm ready," she said

bringing her nail varnish to his room.

“Don’t do your nails!” he cried. “They’re marvellous as it is.”

“O they won’t take a minute. Look they’re nearly done.”

How many women have said ‘It won’t take a minute’ and then proceeded to take an hour? And how many men have begun by believing it?

After ten minutes, while she was blowing on them he said: “You’re breaking my heart.”

“What, already?” wistfully she smiled up at him “Why?” she asked.

“Do you really think you’re being quick?”

“But I am!” she said imploringly. “I’ve never been so quick.”

“If I tell you you’re not and shout, maybe I’ll spoil your mood, so I’d better not; but if you don’t get us out of this house within two shakes of a lamb’s tail you’ll spoil mine—and don’t do that.

He decided that in five minutes more he would walk out on her.

“That’s a nice blouse,” he said. It was white and severely simple. It had no collar but rounded her neck like a knife. “It’s the finest blouse I have ever seen,” he said. “Of course it fits you, I suppose if it didn’t it wouldn’t be. I like the long, balloon sleeves.”

Quite observant for a ragamuffin. Her skirt was corded thick and also white, he saw. And she put on the neatest of white rain-coats. She was having a holiday in white to-day.

Her eyes had a film over their green: like moonlight asleep on the lawn. “Shall I leave my books here? Am I coming back after the match?” he asked.

“Yes, please do,” she said. “Roland won’t be back. But please do,” she said. “I must go out by 9.0, that’s all.”

And they left.

It was so late he would rather have skipped lunch but he supposed she must eat. She'd had no breakfast beyond the tea.

"Let's have a terribly quick lunch at the Corner House Help Yourself," he said. "Please let's hurry like billy-o."

"*I am* hurrying," she said. And started running. If a seal runs . . . She was sensuous, sinuous, rubbery, willowy. That was the trouble. He'd been thinking about her all the time. He . . . we don't know how this got into his system . . . he was repelled more than attracted by sensuality. He had a pure microbe. That's why he had liked her blouse: simplicity. For a man who spent almost all his free moments ogling after the opposite sex he lusted amazingly little. Bright eyes, a sharp wit, laughter, these things rang the bells for him, the body from the neck downwards and how women wobbled and worked with it, registered so little with him as to be negligible. He thought Kari's face was like a handsome piglet's: he was damned if he could see what Quarrel had raved on about so much. Mark liked her; he could have had many a worse sister-in-law, but if he never saw her again as long as he lived he wouldn't lose any thinking over it. Already the people were staring at her. Even in those few yards to the Corner House a hundred people must have stopped slyly in their walks. And in the Corner House the little attentions she was getting! Someone helping her with her tray, someone advising that this sweet was the best . . . Mark was getting a feeling of basking in reflected glory. Whisky had given him that before. But no human had. He was still thinking of the matter. It seemed Quarrel's words weren't just the idle outbursts of a moon-struck youth. Mark felt like a man who has believed himself to be seeing perfectly all his

life and is suddenly told that he has a squint or is colour blind.

They joined two men at a table who were instantaneously put off their conversation by Kari's presence. They both started blushing like the backsides of mandrills.

Perhaps it's because she's my sister-in-law, Mark thought, and purity isn't allowing me to covet my brother's wife?

"The world likes you," he said, "Quarrel is so crazy about you, you disturb him. Aren't you lucky?" he added. "You need have no problems in life. Just be: and the earth is yours and all that is in it. I like your young body," he continued, noticing her breasts for the first time. "There's something so damn right about a young woman's body."

The two sitting at their table were in their best clothes, up for the Final, out for the day, shy, half ashamed, heads down, hang-dog expressions, but with that amount of determination to their faces that showed that they were not going to miss anything that day. They were to paint the town red in the evening. They took everything in. The Corner House meant every bit to them that it meant to Mark: it overwhelmed them. They were off praising this and that. Every second inside their heads, ticking like a clock, was: "I'll tell Reg this when I get back." "I must tell Annie about that." Middle-aged as they were, they behaved like boys on a Sunday School treat having arrived at an awe-inspiring place. Their home town was their world, and London was the world-plus. It was something you went to two or three times in a life and told your fellows about for the rest of time. (Much as Londoners themselves might talk of Paris.) They had come to have their eyes, minds and bodies titillated.

At this moment London and Kari meant identical thoughts. So this 'she' was London! They'd tell Reg, but perhaps not Annie. There was always something some people told Reg and not Annie. (As with Londoners when they return from Paris.)

"Are you going to the match?" asked Mark of them as they first knocked over and then passed the pepper to Kari.

"Yes, yes, we are. Are you?" Kari and Mark didn't look like Cup Final types.

"Oh yes," said Mark. "We've got our tickets. Aren't we lucky? It's not easy to get tickets, is it?"

"We raffled off ours in our workshop. 'Arry 'ere and me were the lucky ones." Then after a moment. "Would it be impertinent—I 'ope you don't mind me asking—if we asked you which side you'd be supporting? We're United fans ourselves. You're not Rovers' people are you?"

"I am," said Kari, to Mark's amazement. "I hope they win 20-0," she added.

And when the other two had left Mark said to Kari, "Since when have you been supporting the Rovers?"

"Since they said they supported the United," was what Kari said!

"Then why rub salt into their wound, and this 20-0? Have you no pity?"

"Has a eunuch sex?" she asked.

"No. He's had it taken away."

"That's right. Had it taken away."

II

Singing hi hi yip-py-ip-py-hi,
Singing hi hi yip-py-ip-py-hi,
Singing hi hi yip-py-ip-py,

Hi hi yip-py-ip-py,
Hi hi yip-py-ip-py-hi.

Wembley! And the magic of it!

By charabanc and private car, by rattle-trap and Rolls, by tin Lizzy, boneshaker, sputter-bus and bike: by Underground and Overground, electric train and steam, from Baker Street and Marylebone, from Euston and King's Cross: out of every depot, bus terminus and halt, from England's metropolis to the national ground at Wembley.

Trilby hats, bowler hats, gaw-blimey hats and scarves; Rover fans, United fans and neutral fans and all; in mackintosh and Burberry, in camel hair and fur, in every kind of cap and coat in coagulum to Wembley.

Amen curlers, gospel pounders, enemies of sin; costermongers, pedlars, flash salesmen and touts: they're out there for your soul or cash as you wind your path to Footballdom up the Empire Way to Wembley.

Halleluhah friend-of-God! hot gospellers and wags; lust busters, redemption agents, last minute ticket scouts: huckstering and haggling, hawking and higgling, you'll get the Buskers' Symphony as you wind your way to Wembley.

“Ice cream! Ice cream!”

“The only official programme one shilling!”

A motor-coach with a station-bell.

A Rovers' blonde in blue.

A United man in a red top hat.

A pantechnicon all shout.

Rattle, rattle, clapper, bell, whistle, drum, and accordion.

A United lad in a red nightshirt.

A dog in blue and white.

A party of twenty rumba-ing.

A party of ten United fans carrying a Rover's corpse.

Bugle, bag-pipe, racket, horn, cymbal, comb and harmonica.

"I-couldn't-sell-you-ice-cream-in-hell-ma'am - if - I - couldn't-sell-you-this."

"I'zis Wembley?" "S'no 'Thursday.'" "So'm I, le's have a drink."

Three men naked to the vest: "We've put our last shirt on the Rovers!"

"United medallion?" "Rover rosette?"

"Ice cream! Ice cream!"

"The only official programme one shilling!"

A band of ex-soldiers, half blind, half lame.

Kari and Mark are somewhere there, in the curds and in the clots, in the herds and in the knots, that jam in human-solder to be welded in at Wembley.

They're up by the Stadium now! Kari's white mackintosh, sheeny and beamy, silky and milky, waxy like lilies, tallow like moons, and that most excitable ragmuffin, Mark, listening to that Symposium that is stoking up inside. Old Music's Roaratorio!—composed in the North of England and played in the South of England when Football takes its Final up to Wembley, to be fought out for and thundered out at Wembley, up to that Magic Spell at Wembley, once a year.

12

"I'd like to see that therc Janie Jackson, 'Erbert, at the Palladium tonight. She's got a 'ot mind," came from behind Mark and Kari.

"Keep *your* mind on the game Charlie," said Herbert.

"Ave yer bin with the 'Rovers long?" asked Charlie of Mark and Kari seeing their rosettes.

"An hour and a half," said Kari twinkling.

"But I have for years," put in Mark, "only my

friend here has only just decided to support them."

"I see," continued Charlie. "She'll give me insomnia," he whispered loudly to Herbert. "So you don't actually come from there?" he asked.

"No," said the others.

"Bet *she's* on the gold standard with a battery like that," Charlie whispered out loud again. "Oh, we sees them every week," Charlie said to Mark and Kari. "Ave done for years. Now that there Rockdon there—'e's outside right—'e's on the edge there alone,"—the teams were kicking about before the match—"e comes from our Darlington Street. Just three doors away. Known 'im fer years we 'ave."

"Is he a good fellow?" asked Mark.

"Ugh! that's difficult to say," said Charlie edging a little towards them. "The best an' the most aloof you might say. See what it says in your programme—lend me your programme 'Erbert—there you are, 'Probably the most consistent footballer playing, he has never been known to play a poor game. Sixteen years with the Rovers and playing his first game when he was himself sixteen, and except for the war, has missed fewer First Division games than anyone. He is rated more by his unfailing reliability than by his brilliant flashes, but watch his centreing, he looks for a spot where the ball can go . . . and there it is.' That's 'im, not flashy. Just certain. I've watched 'im myself these ten years."

They were kicking about in the goals now. Rockdon stood alone and moved about very little.

"Yer see 'e's alone," Charlie from behind went on, "'e always is. 'Is clubmates say 'e even gets in a carriage alone. Yet they'll 'ave nothin' against 'im. 'E's done 'em all a good turn or a kindness sometime. They say 'e's the cleanest man on and off the field. I've never even seen 'im even charge a man, even

fairly, can yer believe that? 'E ses 'Good morning' to 'Erbert an' me each day of our lives, don't 'e 'Erbert?" "Y^{es}," says Herbert.

"But never ten words more," Charlie went on. "Down at the pub 'e 'as a beer an' a round of shuv-appeny what 'e loves but 'e'll never talk much football—doesn't seem to care about football much at all, rum it seems to me—about 'is little girl maybe, an' where 'e'll go for the 'olidays—always to the sea-side 'e says—but nuttin' else, nuttin'. Not even about 'is missus. An' they says something about 'er being no good, but she's a good looker I'll say that."

Herbert being asked to confirm this confirmed it in a spate of very surprising fire.

"But yer asks 'im ow's 'is missus," said Charlie "an' 'e'll say 'What?' 'c'll say 'oh she's fine.' Nice neat little 'ouse 'e's got. An' I 'ears 'e refused two medals in the war, an' I believes it. They say 'e says 'e didn't do more than the others an' I believe 'e says that."

The subject of all this discourse, having put one ball over, was clinging to the touch-line as if he had nothing to do with the rest of the players at all. His heart was beating as much as any, but who would think it? He behaved as if he wasn't there: or at the most, waiting for his wife on some street corner. No one would have guessed the appalling palpitations that were tearing through him . . . here's the ball coming to him, he puts it nonchalantly back then returns to the touch-line hugging it, almost absent, or almost as if entwined to it. Yet fact it was, if you could have read him, that at that moment drums were beating, streams were gurgling hell bent through him, butterflies were in his stomach and even the touch-line seemed company and friendly in these horrible minutes.

Charlie said: "There's the ref going up now

'Erbert. Boo 'im fer me, will yer, while I 'as a cup of tea. 'Ere ma'am, 'ave a cup yerself!"

And he produced a flask.

"No thanks," from Kari: and Charlie, pouring out, went on: "Rockdon's mate, Al' Jenkins the inside man, 'as been with 'im for six years and ses he's a grand feller when yer knows 'im an' Rockdon was best man last week at Al's wedding. Only Mrs. Rockdon didn't go on account of what they ses about 'er. Doesn't dribble much," he continued after Kari and Mark had failed to press for more scandal about Mrs. Rockdon, "but 'e runs like a 'are. They're off!" And Dixon the United goalkeeper had pulled a ball out of the sky in the first second.

13

THE game had been on thirty-five minutes now and there had been no score.

Kari was standing very close to Mark and Mark was thinking that this presence had more warmth and value to him than the presence of he who had to stoop to let the moon pass by, Tiny. He was glad Kari had come.

"That's the one with the ball now. Very unusual move of his to go down there for the ball." The neighbour near Kari was not letting them forget for a moment that the Rovers' winger lived three doors away in Darlington Street. Herbert now had poured himself a cup of tea but had paused till this was over.

Rockdon had gone to the left-half position to collect the ball. Then he tied it to his bootlace and dribbled up. Soon a crowd of players seemed before him and he avoided them by going back. He should have passed. Roberts and Grant of the United stood before him again and he returned with the ball towards his

own goal. He still clung to the left of the field and was retreating backwards when he swerved and had passed three men in the suddenness of it, including Grant and Roberts, and he was once more weaving up forward. Kari suddenly clutched Mark's hands.

A man as tall as a pine said, "I was watching Killiney playing Ballybrack and in the first seconds a Killiney back sent a Ballybrack forward on a ten-yard sprawl. The referee ordered the back to leave the field. The back refused. The referee then ordered the Killiney captain to order the Killiney back to leave the field. The captain refused. So the referee ordered both teams off. Then we all went home."

Rockdon would have been more surprised than anyone to have known what his neighbours thought of him. He looked upon himself as the keenest player in the game. When he had scarcely stood twice as high as the ball his parents couldn't wrench it away from him. Centre-half was the position of his heart as a schoolboy, yet shyness had kept him from it and still did. In those early games of childhood when boys must be where there is most of it, he thought it the coveted position and refrained from asking for it, always meaning to next time. When he did play there, tackling and positioning both seemed to come to him as nature. He fancied his shooting from the half-back position more than from anywhere and had as a boy scored many goals. Yet because he cherished the position so he felt everyone else must and so he took every other position in the field except that. As a boy it was discovered he had a gift for centreing and that it was that fated his future.

He had married a chorus girl from a London show and everyone except he himself knew that she had no very good reputation. He never asked or inquired and would have believed her against the world if he

had heard hearsay. Why not? She was as fine a wife as there was. She loved him because he loved her—just for that reason. She hadn't met a person before who hadn't queried her past. The present and future concerned him; her past was hers not his and he wished to hear only that which she wished to tell him. So it was she loved him not for himself but for his simple, straight love for her. Now they had a four years old daughter, Jennifer, who was there with her mother to-day watching her father doing 'what he always got up to when he was away from home so much.'

The boy Rockdon had suddenly sprung as a youth in his club to being their outside right when he could never have hoped to have held his position anywhere else. The gift of centreing anywhere to an inch and prodigious speed were the only great qualifications he had had for that position. It seemed it was the only position on the field where he could not shoot well from; he rarely dribbled . . . though he had ever practised and practised; only this wretched shyness and lack of courage kept him from tempting failure . . . and he beat everyone by speed or not at all: he felt his lack and was always hankering to play elsewhere. It was in this that he had ever practised since a boy that he was now indulging in that had now astonished so much all who knew him, in this tying-the-ball-to-his-lace and human hair-pin dribble that he had rushed into at this moment. Down he was running, weaving the pattern on. The crowd which had been screaming for him to pass-it-for-Christ's-sake were beginning to get into a subdued awe. They felt they must let the man have it out: even if he lost it now it was entertainment. This was becoming one of those miracles of the football field that if one has the luck one might see once in a lifetime. Kari, excited too, was digging a nail into Mark's hand; but both of them

were so absent that neither of them noticed it.

But friendly, Rockdon had always felt himself to be, and his neighbours' words would have upset him. When only sixteen, by a series of accidents he had suddenly been thrust one afternoon into the Rovers' first eleven to become the youngest first-class player in the country. And by accidents to four men he had stayed there. Yet in all this time he had not lost the fear of losing his place if he played a poor game, a fear of the ignominy of the cry of the crowd if he attempted a continuous dribble that failed. Yet now . . .

"Get at him!" "Up-end him!" "Where's the United?" "Gone to p——?" "I stop 'im ref an' we'll give yer a 'ouse."

Thus yelled the United supporters. The Rovers supporters held their breath. (And Herbert held his tea.) "I saw Killiney play Ballybrack once," said the pine tree again, "and the centre forward was doing just this sort of thing. He was just about to shoot with an open goal when a Killiney supporter in the crowd drew out a revolver and shot the ball dead. Then we all went home."

Charlie had got himself caught in the spell. He had been turning to add something to Kari and Mark and had got locked in a half turn and would finish it in a minute when this was over. "That's him now," he had repeated, but had hardly heard his own voice, being caught as in a noose. Kari dug into Mark's hand desperately and snuggled very close against him.

Rockdon lived for football, day dreamed and night dreamed of it: treated his boots like two small babies, nursed them, greased them, oiled them, gave them new laces . . . it was pathetic how they were falling to pieces, but nothing would get him to try a new pair . . . he had tried once two years ago: he just couldn't

play in them . . . He had no other interests: he was quiet and did not pester everybody with something he knew was fanatical, his zest for this game: that's why he spoke little of it to strangers: but he lived for it and dreaded that year when age would take him out of it: he knew he would never go near a field again, never watch it, anything: it would be too much. His wife knew his passion and she was here to-day: though in fact she rarely did see him play and cared little for it. The little girl of four was in the stadium having never seen her daddy play and having no realisation of 'what he got up to when he was away.'

There was something electric coming over the ground. A hush. Oddly like a terror. Mark heard a typewriter come to him from a reporter's stand. Yes, a typewriter! No cough, no voice, no rustle, no breath: a 100,000 weren't breathing it seemed: but there, tap, tap, tap someone like a woodpecker on a typewriter.

Bill Rockdon down there held eleven United footballers mesmerised in a maze and weave of dribbling no one had ever seen the like of. They collected after tackles, massed, came at him: he was not there. One minute he was stationary like shooting-popcorn in a jar, then the next flashing forward, dribbling like a centipede with lightning behind it. He had crossed the field completely to his own wing, turned as if to centre, then turned back and cut across towards the middle. No one yelled advice. A 100,000 football cranks had no advice to give. Even the United supporters didn't seem to want him up-ended any more. Just for a moment Mark felt pain in his right hand but forgot it instantly.

Yes, truly, who would have thought it, since Rockdon had been ten years old he had been practising this very dribble, and a million times had dreamt

of it; yet in the electricity of the moments of his matches he had lost that spark of courage, had centred, passed, achieved all the traditional expectations of him with honours: but ordinary, ordinary: no First Division would have ever left him out; yet never an international selection committee would have considered him in: first class, but no spark, no act of genius. An ordinary man who had gone to the top through tenacity and reliability . . . he still meant, and he must do, to ask the Rovers' selectors if he couldn't once try at centre-half if only in some practice game. And he must improve his left foot. How monstrous. Ever since he had kicked a ball he had loved it so much he couldn't take time off to perfect his left foot. His right knew every touch and more: his left failed, yet itched, yearned, so bursting angry in its boot, not to be given the chances. When this so vital game was over he would start immediately . . .

He was not thinking now. He knew the ball was at his toe: but to say that every touch and swerve of that hypnotic run was brained out would be absurd: instinct took him on and he suddenly had the absolute feeling that he could not lose that ball! Oh yes, the United were a famous side: redoubtable in defence: and this was a Cup Final where cheekiness is not the rule and unselfishness is: but he wouldn't be passing this, oh no: he felt he could run round that field for half an hour. It was really funny if you liked to think of it like that.

"I can't stand this!" said someone. Kari was now clutching Mark with her free hand as well and they were enlocked. He felt a gnawing warmth in his right hand but instantly again forgot it.

Now Rockdon bore down on goal, shimmering through an air-tight defence like a ghost. Four solid men bunched and barred him like a wall. And he put

it over them! and ran round.

“Oh absurd!!” said the man like a pine. He remembered a story about Ballybrack . . .

Someone in the crowd began to laugh: a sort of idiotic laugh.

Rockdon’s neighbour, Charlie, was still half turned. He looked like a man in Pompeii, petrified for ever in a stance the lava had caught him in. And it had turned Herbert into a statue of a man holding a cup of tea.

Rockdon was in the penalty area.

Rockdon could pass. Men were waiting there for it and his every road was blocked. It would be a dying pity to waste all that. But he corkscrewed right across the goal and out to the left. It was senseless. Just being greedy when half his own men were waiting and could bang it home. But across the goal he went with no attempt to shoot. Rockdon knew something else and there wasn’t a man in the stadium who knew his secret: he had told his wife but then she pretended interest yet she didn’t really understand. He had always thought, for years and years he had thought it, that his right foot was such that if he could only play inside left he could shoot from there like frightened lightning, guillotining any goalkeepers in the way. He had seen his road blocked: he darted across to a narrow angle on the left. They thought, here was something no one could logically explain, a man’s gone mad with a football, but there’s no sense to what he does, he’ll dribble out of touch or back to his own goal or over, look, he’s going to the corner flag . . . He turned on some speed like a Catherine-wheel trying to catch up on yesterday’s fireworks, and flashed right out for the corner flag . . .

“It’s a goal!” “It’s a goal!” “Did you see?” Rockdon had spun like a top in a whirlwind and roared it in . . .

but Dixon had pulled it down! What a save! My heavens what a save! The man, the fastest blue-streak of our day was there and had got it down. What a climax . . .

What happened then was the greatest anticlimax ever seen. With the whole field tensed as never, with a 100,000 people out of their skins, caught in that mesh of that spell, Dixon having saved the save of the century, from a shot, the shot of the century, after a dribble, the dribble of the century . . . the ball came back to Rockdon, standing still. As if he was just tapping a ball to a boy in an empty field years ago in his childhood days, he lifted, first time, the slowest ball ever kicked, over the head of every man standing in a tensed goalmouth towards the yawning, yearning and gaping far top corner of the net. Slowly, slowly, slowly, like a sail coming into port, and no one could touch it so high it was, kissing the underside of the bar how-are-you? floating in like a toy balloon adrift on a sea-front in a near calm . . . Into the corner, patting the underside of the chin of the bar, with not enough strength to touch the side rigging, or the back rigging. Dixon lying helpless at the wrong end of his charge. So easy, so comfortable. No one roared "Goal!" It had been the final touch of the hypnotist that had sent them all to sleep. No one said anything.

They stood there: the whole damn 100,000: the whole damn Rovers' team: the whole damn United.

Rockdon was standing still. Thirty seconds: no sound, no rustle . . . Then.

There came that silly idiotic laugh somewhere.

Then.

Hell came out.

Came like a burst from a Bofors gun.

There was Jennings tearing across the field as if all of Satan's hordes were after him and Rockdon opening

his two arms and he catching his team-mate and six-year partner as Jennings dived for him. Then that idiotic giggle somewhere. Getting louder. Yet, they were already massacring Rockdon and he was almost in an idiotic giggle himself. All that timidity, all that control that had kept him untrue to himself all these years, kept him from risking, kept him . . . back . . . it had served him then. His right foot from the inside left position could not fail him: and with a calm and control abnormal if it hadn't been his very character, he was every inch himself as he lifted that final ball. His years of centreing to fractions till he could have knocked the apple off the son of William Tell's head or a splinter off a block, it had all served him in that one centre which was not a centre but his goal.

The crowd had broken loose. They were going over. Kari had kissed Mark. Then, unable to check herself at all she was kissing everyone in reach. The stadium went hay-wire: nothing anyone did was wrong. Bart, the Rovers' keeper, was tearing up the turf to shower his congratulations in. The United captain went up and shook Rockdon's hand.

But we have to report one man who had not yet awoken. Charlie. He just stood there and stood there, his head ticking like a clock.

Herbert, after a long pause, flung his cup, tea and all, up and away to the winds.

Kari kissed Charlie. Charlie put his hand to his cheek, said "I don't believe it" and went on ticking like a clock. Then she kissed Herbert. "Thank you," Herbert said. "My hand!" cried Mark. The nail had dug so far home blood was freely spurting out. "O dearie dear," cried Kari: "did I do that?" She kissed it many times, took out some eau-de-cologne, dabbed it on, took out a handkerchief, bound the hand, and went on making a fuss of everybody. Mark then kissed

the first kiss of all his life. He kissed Kari. Rockdon had just knocked ten years off Mark's usual rate of amorous progression.

And a mother somewhere was hugging a four year old child called Jennifer with tears streaming down her handsome face. The Rovers' Manager had come and embraced her too and her little daughter. The little girl with eyes like diamonds was turning round and round saying to the wind and the world "It was my Daddy. It was my Daddy."

14

MARK remembers the spot to this day. They had taken the train from Wembley to Oxford Circus and were walking through the back streets home. Where Hanover Square turned down into George Street on this late Saturday afternoon the whole vista before and about was empty, and it was there that Mark put his question. Never can Mark go near that spot but he remembers every syllable of this conversation.

"Kari, forgive me," he asked, "it's not my business, not my business at all, but why don't you do something?"

"Do something? What, Mark?"

"O, I don't know what. It only seems to me that if you sleep and eat and lull and lay . . . I mean, why don't you learn to play the piano? . . . I don't know what. I don't mean do anything just for doing something, I know there's no need, but . . . where's the fun, the life as it were? O, I suppose it's no business of mine, I'm sorry: but . . . get a kick out of life. You said to-day was the first time you had been out of doors. Play something, read, learn, look at London, I don't know, it seems to me you could make your life so full, and . . . and there's nothing. Is there?"

She had stopped: No one had spoken to her as a schoolmaster before, certainly no strippling, lean-as-a-rake student.

There were ten thousand wars going on inside her. She said:

“I have done too much already.”

But they had both stopped and that's why Mark remembers that spot so well.

“O, I, I’m sorry, I . . . I didn’t know Kari . . . can you . . . tell me . . . or is it something . . . ?”

“No I . . . I can’t tell you. Roland doesn’t know either.”

What? What could this be? Mark could think of nothing. Sensuous figure. The little sensuous figure. Mark was seeing it all for the first time.

“I worked . . . in concentration camps.” The battle was over and the storm clouds already passing by. Only it had happened that the wrong side had won: Kari had been mad to have told a soul. They were seeking after her yet—these wretched Allied War Crimes Police. She had taken a mighty chance . . . telling . . .

“Never never tell a soul,” she said.

“I promise, I promise,” Mark replied quickly. “My God, my God! In heaven’s name forgive me for all that I said. Was it . . . but it must have been . . . so, so terrible . . . ?”

“I think you’ve heard . . . too much. If anyone finds out I’ve told you, they will kill me.”

“I’d like you to know, Kari, that I know, I do know really, that I’m all right, very all right, at keeping a secret . . . of course I don’t know about third degree or anything, as I’ve never had that, but otherwise, certainly, don’t worry, no one in the world will ever hear it. And also I must, I must Kari, say that I never valued a thing before in my life as the trust you have

just shown in me. I feel very proud. It is very great. I can't say how ~~or~~ overwhelmed I am with the trust you have put in me."

"I don't think I should have told you," was all Kari said.

And they moved away.

And the spot became a spot by the empty Hanover Square again, whereas for a minute it had been filled with vast war: war in a breast: for Kari had never, never told anyone anything—personal—in all her life before.

15

THEY mounted the stairs at Jermyn Street and into the apartment. Was it fancy on Mark's part or did Kari go to the window to look out as through the curtains?

Mark left for the living-room and wished to stare out too, but refrained—in case there *was* something funny going on. Strange about that kiss at that match. Mark was not amoral. He was violently moral and violently immoral: he had his own codes. He would never have kissed his brother's wife, but she had begun it, and he, certain that it had 'meant nothing,' had returned it. If it had 'meant something' he could never have done it. He was very far from being in love with Kari. And she belonged to Roland.

How nice to have kissed someone! How very fine a thing is a kiss!

She came in holding a box about a foot square. It looked like a present you would give a child for Christmas.

"Look!"

She took the lid off.

It was a chemistry outfit.

“Good God, whatever’s that for?”

“Isn’t it sweetie?” said Kari. “It’s the oldest thing I’ve got. I had it when I was ten. Don’t you think it’s sweet?”

“Sweet? Sweet? I suppose it’s sort of toyish . . . Do you use it?”

“I’ve always used it.”

“Have you? What the hell for?”

“Mark.”

“Yes, Kari?”

“In the camps I did this sort of thing.”

“O no, O no: no Kari, you didn’t?” he shouted, “and all those appalling experiments and . . .?”

“Experiments and . . .”

Mark dashed his head to his hands.

“They sent me in as a decoy at first. To mix with the prisoners and find out things. I made friends with the doctors and . . . I became . . . assistant, nurse . . . I did these things Mark, all of them. Invented them . . .”

Mark turned round. Took her by the shoulders. And in short sharp words said:

“You trust me, don’t you? I won’t let you down. And I am no being to set myself up in judgment. Those things were the devil’s. I met a Russian who at the point of the bayonet had to load an aeroplane with bombs. He had to climb in the plane and with a pistol at his head had to release those bombs onto his own village. What he did was the devil’s work. But who was the devil? I’ll sit in judgment on no man or woman. There can be an operation in our minds that leaves it that all other considerations are cancelled out except that one consideration how you are to me and I to you. And I will commit that operation. You have put your trust in me, Kari, and I will have you know for all time that I am proud as I have never been that

you dare trust me with knowledge that is heinous."

Kari, so much within herself, went towards the window, and in a voice as from a tomb said:

"I enjoyed doing these things."

"So did the Marquis de Sade enjoy digging penknives into young ladies. But this same Marquis de Sade was later deprived of the office he was given by the Revolutionaries because he would not be brutal enough, even to those who had plagued him and persecuted him all his life."

Kari continued staring out of the window. "You know a lot about the Marquis de Sade?"

"I know a lot about many things," said Mark: "except the one wretched thing I am to take an examination in, architecture."

Sne turned on him from the window. "I had to warn you, Mark." Warn him? She had never warned a soul of a drop of rain before: what was happening to her?

"Warn me, Kari? Isn't that even something that you warn me? There are public matters and private matters: and the private matter between you and me as I just said is how you are to me. So far you have given me your trust and a warning. My loyalty to you is yours always. But my friendship and love is complementary entirely to your friendship and love to me."

"Mark," she said. "I have rather a funny thing to ask you."

"What is it, Kari?"

"Would you, I wonder, take this for a while?"

"This chemistry set?"

"Yes."

"Whatever for?"

"I can't bear to part with it. It's old-friend-and-sentiment and that. Yet, I think, maybe I am suspected here. And you see if they search this flat this would give me away."

“Are you in danger Kari?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Can I help?”

“The less you know the better.”

“I suppose it is. What am I to do with this?”

“Just keep it down at Clucktown. I’ll ask for it back when I know all is well.”

They made tea. It was always tea for Kari. Morning, noon, and night it was tea, tea, tea. It had made an English woman of Kari in a week.

“So you are English now?” Mark said as they sat close by the window, staring across the thirteen plane trees and one other to the lights of Ficcadilly.

“English? O. I have four passports, I seem to collect them.”

“Roland was proud to present you with your fourth?”

“How do you mean?”

“Didn’t you get your English passport through him?”

“Yes.”

“That’s what I meant.”

“It was the condition.”

“Condition?”

“Condition of my coming with him.”

Mark jumped up.

“Don’t you, don’t you . . . love Roland?”

“No.”

“Great God above! What *is* all this? What *is* all this, Kari?”

“I had to get out of France. To South America or to Spain. Roland is happy and satisfied, don’t worry.”

“Satisfied? He’s goddamn plum crazy about you. He’s madly, insanely in love with you. O my God! and you don’t love him?”

“He’s satisfied. I’ve told you.”

“Satisfied! Satisfied! What sort of a satisfaction is this, Kari?”

“Much more than he could have hoped for any other way.”

“But . . .”

“But your brother, Mark, has tried to commit suicide twice in three weeks because I would not go with him. I have never loved . . . anyone. I can only hate. Your brother is living with me. He could never have hoped for more.”

In a sudden flash Mark whirlwinded round:

“Are you, or are you not, married, Kari?”

“To Roland?”

“Yes, to Roland?”

“No, I am not.”

Mark paced the floor. Back and forth. Back and forth. His head was split into a million atoms with hammers pounding at each one.

“And he loves you so much, loves you so much, loves you so much . . . !”

“Love hurts, I suppose,” said Kari.

“Bloody blithering fool! Love hurts? Sh-t! Sh-t! That’s what you say. Love cures hurts. When love itself hurts it is frustrated or sick.”

“Then I suppose that’s the only sort of love I can give.”

“God! God! God!” cried Mark pacing up and down. “Poor bloody Roland! My God! My God! So you’re not even married to him? Golly, golly, golly!”

“Living with him. He could never have expected to be so happy.”

“For a few days. How will it end?”

“I must get out my dress. I must go out.”

“I said how will it end?”

“That’s my business.”

“Perhaps you can get to love him . . . ?”

She lifted her shoulders and shrugged them. She must be leaving to meet her father.
He sat down.

Now how were his kisses now?

Only an hour or two. Now he had left Clucktown and entered in somewhere else. Like leaving a pea of an island and going over to the mainland for the first time. And he didn't like the mainland. Someone had taken the lid off hell and let it loose on the mainland. All principles had left the mainland: love and loyalty out: torture is the key maxim; concentration camps, cheats, callousness: the mainland has got inundated in a sea of unnecessary suffering. He had never liked Clucktown: but it was fairy innocence to him now. No chemical experiments . . . no song of hate sung out; no sickening for lost loves; no uniforms, no beatings, no gas chambers: no marriage that was no marriage . . . poor bloody Roland: God, what it is to love and not be loved! Better take the blinkers off, Mark. The world is not Clucktown. There's police states, cruelty, crime, hunger, disease, slums, sorrow, sorrow, sorrow, poverty, hell, hate, hate, hate, selfishness, unnecessary torments dished out in buckets-full, and O THE CALLOUSNESS in the great so unwondrous mainland.

Last Wednesday Mark had become a man.

To-day he had had his eyes thrust into a world he had only read about in garish newspapers. They who come from their Clucktowns never somehow quite realise that what the newspapers say, is, to somebody, reality. There once was a man who wrote the Tragedy of his Life. When he read it afterwards he realised with

gall 'that nothing even Shakespeare could have done could have made it any other than a Story. He tore it up! For it had not been a Story. It had been the Tragedy of his Life.

Better get going now, Mark. Before you discover that Quarrel has started a pogrom off down there, or Whisky has been shot for his fur.

16

WHEN Mark reached the foot of the stairs with his small parcel he saw, on the other side of the street, standing waiting, a policeman. Filled up suddenly inside with something he didn't know what, but it was "terror, he returned quickly up the stairs. Kari opened the door, and in he went.

She couldn't help laughing. "You'd have been a lot of good in our work," she said. She was changing and had a black chiffon gown on.

"But what can I say, supposing somebody asks me what this is and all that?" A knowledge that he couldn't have made any answers to any questions asked . . . Where had he got it, this packet? What was he doing with it? Why had his sister-in-law given it to him? What was she doing with it? What had she done anyhow? What did he know?

"My word, I have to tell you honestly, Kari," he began, "I'll keep faith with you, I'll keep any secret: you can trust me till I die . . . if life is normal to me: but under capture, under questions, under third degree, under torture . . . Yes, I trust myself under torture . . . but under questions . . . you see you have to give some answers lest you give the game away. I just don't know how it will be. Maybe, fine: maybe . . . I don't know. I want to ask, Kari, what am I to

do, if this, this packet, worries me too much? I'll try, but I don't know . . . ”

“Break it up and destroy it, Mark. It's only an ordinary schoolboy's chemistry set. You might have had it yourself. There's nothing to it, Mark: destroy it if you don't want it. I only had some feelings about it and I would have liked it if it could have been kept.”

“The policeman's still there. Can I just ask you . . . it's a wrong question perhaps, forgive it if so . . . but Kari, about all this, all this that you have been telling me, don't, aren't there any . . . well, how shall I say? . . . ghosts haunt you, shall I say like that?”

“No, Mark. What I did I did for the Fuehrer. Your soldiers killed for your King. Your African settlers mutilated their black slaves—well for Christ I suppose. I, and your airmen who bombed German and French villages, and those who dropped the atom bomb, sleep well. Actually there is one ghost who haunts me.”

“Can I ask, who?”

“I had nothing to do with his death. It was an ordinary—one of your English cockneys. It was because, Mark, he had a philosophy which beats all people like me. I heard him tell a friend “ang on to yer sense of 'umour 'Arry, an' yer've got 'em all licked.’ Cold blooded; nothing •defeated him: ‘There's ol' 'Enry, leaving up the chimney,’ he would say as a friend was put in the incinerator. He kept the spirit up in that whole camp. His last words were, with one foot in the gas chamber, he turned to the guard ‘Comin' in chum? Two's company yer know?’ He beat us, that's why his ghost haunts me.”

“Good for him. May his ghost live long. It's always the humourless people who cause the troubles in this world. The policeman's gone,” said Mark. “I might still catch my train if I hurry. Goodbye, little lady. Fancy you and all this horrific melodramatic world

stepping into my little life like this . . . or stepping up to my front door shall we say?"

"Up to your front door, Mark. And I shouldn't let it in if I were you, your innocence will turn to gall over night. You don't know me, Mark. It was a bad day for you when you first met me."

He meant to shout an angry answer: but he said nothing.

He hurried off.

And she must hurry too: for she must leave to meet her father.

London that night seemed jammed with policemen. And everyone of them seemed staring at him. And everyone he passed seemed to have eyes not for him exactly but only for his packet. And when a passer-by asked him the time he really meant "Were you in the 'business' too?" or "What is in that packet old boy?" and tapped the bloody chemistry set.

There was a policeman inside the bus when he climbed into it and Mark got off quickly, giving no reason. If anyone was not suspicious of him this sort of carry-on would soon make him so. He climbed another bus and went straight upstairs. A man came up behind him and sat immediately beside him. When Mark asked for a fourpenny the man asked for a fourpenny. It was obvious, obvious. Mark got off.

Bloody chemical set. Bloody Kari. Bloody everything.

He'd walk to the station and catch a later train: a wretched slow one, but what to do? He'd missed the quick one anyhow. He didn't want to give Kari away. She said it was as dangerous for him as it was for her now that he knew: 'her people' might come after him, she said, without explaining who 'her people' were. Neither would be let off if it were found out, she had said. Perhaps she was trying to scare him? Frame him? That he would be found with this on him, then be

blackmailed into doing something? The proteins and fat acids in his blood were pumping hell into him at a hundred drams a second. He was not the tiniest bit normal, rational, anything.

He started taking sharp turns, dodging down a sudden tiny street, back on his tracks, on again . . . he'd break this blasted bloody thing to blazes. Couldn't just dump it! Might be questions. Might be finger marks: her finger marks: his finger marks: he'd smash it to Hades and chuck it somewhere. He got on a bus. He got off again.

KARI left to meet her father.

Mark reached his train eventually and then suffered the most excruciating hour of his life. Every single being stared at him: through and through: while all had eyes really only for his packet.

He climbed the cliffs to his home. People were jumping out at him from every bush. He went to an open space where he could see if anyone approached him: he waited half an hour: then he sat, picked up a brick: looked at the chemical set in the rising moonlight: poor Kari: and he smashed it to hell. To the tiniest dust: smashed every little particle. Wrapped up the packet again: went home: put it in the dustbin: went in . . . and Whisky went up like Vesuvius, so delighted he was to see him. Aunt Mabel was in bed. It was more than an hour of brooding in front of the fire before his proteins and fat acids died down to their normal quantities. "I can't help it, I can't help it, Whisky," he said. "I hope she won't mind too much."

NEXT night Mark said to Whisky, "Have you ever seen the sunrise?" Whisky, it seemed, hadn't. So Mark promised him a sunrise, a breakfast and a visit to his school if he would "sh" and not wake up Aunt Mabel.

An hour before the sunrise Mark put the excited quadruped out of the window with instructions to "sh" and the dog put on a face as genuine as an undertaker at a thousand pound funeral and never said a word.

The first person they met was a policeman.

"What are you doing at this hour?" asked the law.

"We want to see the sunrise," said a student with his quadruped.

Mark felt friendly and Whisky climbed all over the blue man like a helicopter with engine trouble and felt hurt that the law did not display any warmth in return. Everyone ought to feel friendly.

It was already light; the moon was there, large, insignificant, quite absent in spirit. The still sleep-drowsed River was bestirring itself and pushing out its white sheet coverlet along the beach. Its estuaries and inlets lay like cold ingots of silver among the wastes towards Steerin and the west. The sun had yet to rise. '6.28' said Mark's diary. Whisky saw another dog and rushed to explain that he was taking his master out to see the sunrise, only he, Whisky, was not allowed to use the term 'master' in reference to Mark as they were 'equal' which was why he was different from other dogs. Then they passed a man, broken, shambling, with a red kerchief bundle.

They were down by the shore now and Whisky required games all the time. Whisky knew Mark had the tennis balls with him and there was no peace till

they had played their game of football.

But it was 6.28 and Mark stared eastwards. The sky was yellow: up-shot the sun: quickly. Everything blazed. A crisp yellow. Everything was clear and clean, the colours were young and untainted, not 'used' as in the sunsets: but all was cold. Stark, chill; something had been born; born naked.

Mark said to Whisky: "If your eyes were sensitive to colour, which they are not, and if you could see over great distances, which you can't, I would tell you what all this palaver is about."

The dog knew that something that was thought beyond him was going on: but then he saw a man in running shorts and the lack of trousers made him think that perhaps the man was running and therefore something ought to be done about it, but then he decided that a man couldn't run slower than he could walk so he couldn't be running, so there'd be no point in stopping him.

The breakers of the River laid page after page along the shore, mammoth pages, each one new and fresh and crisp, as Pharoah would have loved a thousand slaves to turn.

19

AND Whisky went to school.

The first person they met as they stood by the school gates was Mathiestone Pride.

"Whisky! Whisky! Whisky!" the student was shouting. The dog had seen the Head in the distance and thought he ought to greet him.

"You haven't..." said Mathiestone Pride, "brought that quadruped of yours to the school have you?"

"Er-yes." Say you like him you old josser else you'll never get any more respect out of me.

Mathiestone Pride did not say he liked him.

"I never did understand you, Wilde," he said.
"You make a joke of the whole thing here."

"Isn't it?" asked Mark, getting the dog back to him.

"Architecture is a noble profession!" said the haughty-for-a-moment Professor: "if the word noble is in your vocabulary, that is. And Wilde, either cut your hair or buy a violin."

"I have, sir."

"Have sir, what?"

"Bought a violin."

"Wilde, the last word has been yours!" And the master left him while he still had his self-control. But he did not pass in. He would have had to have passed that insignificant little Head if he had gone in now. So he went off to the Public Library. He was uncommonly early anyhow. And so was Mark? Most strange.

So no word for Whisky from Mathiestone Pride? That was bad. Old josser Pride. The dog came and stood by Mark's knee.

"Good morning," said Mark to the Head.

"Good morning. Wh . . . aa . . . t???" The small man couldn't say more. And rushed in. Wilde? Early? And surely that wasn't his dog with him? The Head decided that the whole thing had been a mirage, something wrong with his breakfast. He must take the matter up with his wife. Quite impossible . . .

Everyone had to see Whisky.

And here came Iris. O dear, that letter! Palpitations started battering away. No one would have thought that he had *kissed* a married woman two days ago. (Except that now she wasn't married.)

Yes, Iris.

Looking as if she'd get dressed when she got to school.

And here was Joan! And, how had *he* got there?—

Whisky strutting at Joan's side like a life-long companion! The black Persian lamb coat was coming round the corner, and the tiger tawny curls singing all round her face, tinkling away.

But Iris, true to her school sports form, was there first, twenty yards in front. And they were speaking. Actually speaking! What a dank daffodil she looked now . . . Iris, there are crumbs on your face; and marmalade too! This reminds Mark of two pictures of a French prostitute he had seen. One, evening and baited up, two, getting out of bed in the morning. Here was the second picture before him, enough to put anyone off marriage; but see Iris spruced up or on the hockey field, or in the evening class, or at her table tennis championships. Mark decided that Iris had sensuality (Tiny called it essentuality) but Mark, not as allergic to sensuality as most, must have all things neat and tidy or he felt sick.

“Thanks for your letter.”

“O that's all right. Did you get it?”

“Yes. Thanks.” . . .

And there didn't seem much else to say. Whisky had gone inside with that fascinating Joan. Just like that!

“I dare not tell you how long it took me to think about it,” said Iris. “I missed afternoon school because of it.”

“And I dare not tell you how long it took me to write it,” said Mark. “I . . . er . . . missed evening school because of it.”

“I am to give you a message.”

“A message? Who from?”

“From grandmother.”

“From your grandmother?”

“Yes . . . Mark.”

“What is it? . . . Iris. Have I done something terrible?”

“Well: I was rather soft: and I showed my grandmother your letter: and I told her all about you: so she said you seemed a decent sort of a fellow, so would you come to tea?”

“O but I’d love to. When?”

“Wednesday?”

“O I can’t. We’re all going to London to meet my brother.”

“And your sister-in-law? I’ve heard all about Kari, Mark!”

“Have you? What?”

“O that she’s the apple of everyone’s eye and the core of everyone’s heart and is the thief that has stolen Quarrel body and soul. Could I meet her someday?”

“Why of course, that’s fine. I could come to tea Thursday.”

“No come Friday will you . . . Mark? We always have a guest tea on Thursdays. So Friday would be better.”

“A guest tea? . . . Iris?”

“Don’t you know I live with a grandmother and an aunt who keep an establishment for the aged on a hill by the River? . . . But, Wilde, we must hurry: they’re closing the gates.”

Iris that is marmalade on your cheeks! and . . . porridge too! . . .

AND Kari had met her father!

“Mlle. Yvonne du Bois and Mr. Groves.”

The hall was crowded with candelabras and tinkling glasses: and men who were medalled up like candelabras, and women who were jewelled up like tinkling

glasses. Men in uniforms that stood out because of the little that stood within; women with fat that stood out because of the too much that stood within; men who had spent the morning thinking of things to say and now with cold flat eyes were listening to everyone else's women, who had spent the morning thinking of things to wear and now with cold flat eyes were putting a price on everyone else's.

Men foraged among the draughts and women pastured among the pates and there they all were like horses and cows.

Gold thread enough there to run a line round London; furs enough there to make a large rug and tuck up the poor of Poplar for a night; diamonds and sapphires enough to outweigh everything else in Mayfair except the boredom there that fell drip, drip, drip.

The jewels alone begot a life and glared one against the other like basilisk trying to out-hell basilisk.

Then came the announcement: "Mlle. Yvonne du Bois and Mr. Groves." And the world stood still.

And then the world begot a life. And all that had been so dead was suddenly now so living: and all that had been so living—the jewels—were suddenly now so dead: for there had come among them one who was a living jewel.

A touch of water fell on to the heart of Prince Sh—and reminded him that he still had a heart.

And there stood Mlle. Yvonne du Bois: from tip of neck to tip of toe, and tight as a drum-head round those young, young breasts, her whole body was alight in silver satin, kissing her every particle as every man there burned to do.

As water from paradise she flowed between them as she was ushered towards:

the Prince.

O*father, father, take your daughter, kiss her as any daughter should be kissed, off with these state uniforms we both are wearing, let's away and chase each other through Kensington Gardens as we should have done so long ago.

See, here: I come, twenty years I have waited: your child is walking towards you, so wanting to*be a child.

Mr. Groves, father, is a Slav. The nerve of his taking the name of Groves with that accent! But then I was Mrs. Dale once in France wasn't I? We have such fun together, father, Mr. Groves and I. We're always together. A few hours each month always together. We each have five aliases. He is six feet three and has a bull neck, no brain, father, a punch like iron. Don't you think we made a team? Funny how all our . . . conditions, sort of, can make a pair like us real chummy.

Do you like my silver belt, father? Do you like the wide Dolman sleeves dying to a hand-cuff grasp around each wrist? Do you like it that there is no single piece of jewellery about me, father? So different from the jewellery about the jewellery of all these others, isn't it? Do you like the way the dress grips my neck: it's from a Chinese blouse I saw? I had always wondered what I should wear . . . now, father; and I decided this.

Look round this room. O, aren't we all so elegant? Do we *really* pretend here we are pure? Pull out the dirty secret from each one, shall we, father? What is yours? You, who had granted to you all the real markings of manliness, have spent all your time being shifty, and my father I had so prayed to be a Lord Byron, I can see already from here, is shallow. You gloat at me. Thinking of me in bed already? Seeing me naked, or in neglig' already? Your eyes have a longing in them but there's a fatty something over it.

O! and *my* secret, father? Would you like to know

your own daughter's biggest secret? This so sweet and young person coming between the crowds to you is overridden, father, with an insatiable longing for... horror. Horror, horror, horror. Just a word, isn't it? But it's my god, father. Your daughter's god. I would like to bare your bones now, father, and scrape them so sweetly, slowly with a saw-knife.

"Prince: this is Mlle. du Bois."

And, here we are.

"Have you ever heard of Marie Stopes?" Funny, it is on my lips to ask that.

But you are speaking to me. Listen everybody, as the birds are listening outside, my father is speaking to me. Where was I born, did you ask? O but this is much too much that he is asking this! I could have loved this man if he had been what he might have been. I love your silver-grey hair. There is a saying I heard about there being four kinds of hair and you can place people into groups according to the quality. You have the finest quality, father. There is something about a father, isn't there, that there isn't and can never be about any other man?

"Where was I born? Let's sit down, shall we?" And Mr. Groves with his few words of English, wandered off to try and get away with it.

Did I put that question in your mind, father? There ought to be telepathic forces between a father and a daughter oughtn't there?

"Against the shores of a smiling river, under the sigh of an aspen tree, I have been born and lost forever, forgotten by all so dear to me. Monsieur, don't you know where I was born? I am afraid I know no more about it than you do."

Double meanings! Why it's full of games meeting fathers.

O dearie dear, some of the usual drivel pouring out.

Don't give me anything sticky,'father. *What* are you saying?

"Your cheeks, charming angel, are Mongolian, your lips French, your domed eye-brows Siamese, your heavy shell lids Slav, your sweet little ears so English, your doll's puff hands Russian, your nails a tiger's, your breath a leopard's, your whole face a mystery and *such* a galaxy of lovelinesses . . ."

Clouded. Your mind is bright but clouded father. So clouded that you cannot yourself see that it is so. You see only the light underneath your clouds. Too much experience. You're too muddled up. You've not been false just to my mother alone, but to hundreds. You're twisted. Fine figure, standing, you had. And bright eyes still: you've got sex in you you dirty old man. But you're so dull! Golly, if only Mark could dress like you, and have charm like you and have experience like you . . .

"Will you be long in England?" asked the Prince.

"Answering your eyes as well as your lips," Kari answered, "long enough to satisfy your appeals for a visit."

"Oh, but that is so charming, so charming."

Don't speak like that father, it stinks! It's like an icky Frenchman. What about giving me a little poet stuff, Shelley or Pushkin or . . . or Byron . . .

An empty man, this father. Don't want to say it, don't want to see it: but an empty man. What was Mark's father like? I caused his death! I hadn't realised that! Good old me: what a lady! Have you got your doors open, Hell? What welcome is there when your Mistress returns? Everyone gives an icky screech? I would like to kill a hundred million million. With father and Mark to end with. Or begin with. Without me, Mark would have had a father! I like that! I must tell him that! But nothing until Finland

. . . as it is planned, . . . I killed Roland's father too. And their mother. Wonderful, heeee! How ill I am. It's funny that a person cannot see the sky when the mind is clogged. And mine is. Kill them all! Murder, filth, torture, let's kick my feet around in blood and swim in brains. My life's before me. I wonder how many before I die I can get to wish that they had never been born.

"And where were you born, Monsieur?"

"On the shores of the French Riviera in my father's chateau."

Lying to your own daughter!! I don't like it!! I don't like people who lie to me!! I'll take it out of everyone who does!! Everyone must tell me the exact truth!! For I have my methods, and father or not, they will see!! If you had said to me 'I was born in a castle in Murcia in Spain nearly sixty years ago now, and I took a wife when I was twenty, against whom I did many bad things, among which was going with another while she gave birth to our daughter, whom I also wronged', if you had said that to me, I would have taken you back tonight in these war-paint clothes, and introduced you to two others whom you once were only too anxious to disown—and to the devil with all my plans for Finland, we would have made you welcome: I would have done what I have never done, prepared a breakfast; just for you: I would have brought you your slippers; I would have given you one chance, my father, if you had never lied to me . . . I would have sat on your knee! Do you hear me? I would have sat on your knee and asked for a lullaby, yes, yes, a lullaby; oh so late, so late. We would have taken you in, and made you one of us, one who took from us all our parents. Made you welcome: tucked you up in bed: and begged on our knees for you, just once, to tuck us in too.

I thought of you at school father: I often thought of you . . . I often thought . . . that you might have me home . . . some children have a home: but not Roland, not Mark, and not Kari.

I don't like people who lie to me!! I will have the truth!! What was mother like? I never knew. And you will never tell me. I can't believe a word you say!!

I am so disappointed. I had hoped for more from . . . my Prince. I had built up in my mind a fighting Casanova with the poetry of Byron. I had longed for someone who, in his own way, would be great. Perhaps a cheat, but deep. I had so wanted him to be deep.

Nothing deep here. That absurd out-of-heel, out-at-elbow student Mark has him beaten to dust. Even weak Roland has more human warmth. No mind here: scarcely worth playing with, scarcely worth taunting: handsome yes, and a lover, yes, he'd know his tricks as a lover of sixty certainly ought, but when you got up off the bed you'd want to throw him away with the garbage he'd be so dull for lack of other talking. Shall he learn his tricks? The tricks of the lover? What are they? Anything new, father? They have a lot of secret vice: the old Princes: they are hard and they know things. Five generations of aristocracy in my hands: who were we then, father? Tell me, what is all our origin? Shall we get together and dream of the palaces that are no longer ours? Or are they? How much will you tell your own daughter that I will make you sick in love with? I needn't even work on you. You're mine already. And we'll have fun too, fun for me, before you know who it is who gives it you. You'll make yourself a fool and spend that fortune on the one you now will wish to, but on the one you never

wished to. But please, my Prince, don't bore me too quickly: After all, we have some months before our Grand Reunion at our Hamina.

Kari turned on charm that would have melted an ice-flow. Not that it was needed. She touched her father's hand and stroked it like sweet seventeen would: how wonderful, her father! Why he might have stroked her hand had he only wished to years and years ago. Stroked my hand: bought me a new dress to go to school in: bounced me on his knee, or run a race along the sands, pretending to let me win: he could have done, I didn't stop you father, but I'm going to stop you now! You'll want to do everything you might have done! You'll buy me dresses: you'll buy me jewels: you will *want* to bounce me on your knee, but I'll whip you if you lay your filthy paw upon me after, after . . .

Will I drive in the country with you next week, you are asking? Yes, father, let me drive in the country with you. Don't you think it funny you should ask it so nervously? Don't you think it funny that you should have such worry in asking your own daughter to go out riding in the country with you? Heeeeeeeeeeeeee!

21

KARI was yet to take even a greater toll of Mark's friends.

When Tiny, Pills, Quarrel, Mark and Flash went visiting in Jermyn Street, Flash went in last and went out first. Like a pomegranate to the tip of his ears, and seized with a destructive weakness as if a scourer had suddenly been thrust up all his pipes and taken the backbone out.

Kari saw it. She did not speak to him. She did not shake hands or greet him. She brushed by him as if he didn't exist.

But how kindly she fussed in her warmth about the rest.

Quarrel felt that this was his show: he had discovered these people, here was Roland, must introduce him everywhere, warn him that Tiny might knock that lamp over with his leaning . . . And why did Roland have that bandage still at his neck? Quarrel must ask Mark if he knew why. But where was Tiny?

Tiny was in a huddle in one corner with Kari. He was stooping over her and whispering so that no one else heard:

“Mrs. Wilde, I am honoured to meet you. I give you full marks. Absolutely full marks. You're a disturbing influence. And I like disturbing influences. I am the son of a bishop and all sons of all bishops simply adore disturbing influences. Now I mustn't be selfish and keep you from the others, but where is your husband, I must congratulate him?”

“He's here,” Kari was smiling, putting forth all the charm in her being; “can I call you Tiny like everyone else?”

“As Tiny as a worm before you. You get full marks. I am thoroughly disturbed. I agree with St. Augustine, ‘Lord make me pure: but not yet.’ Now is this your husband?”

And Tiny bowed down before Roland.

“I bow before the husband of the most beautiful wife in London,” he said, “Mr. Wilde, my warmest handshakes.” And he nearly wrung Roland's arm off from his shoulder.

Kari said: “I'll go and put the tea on.”

And Flash said “Can I help?” and he followed her.

In the kitchen he thought he'd just like a few words with her and innocently pushed the door to.

"Don't you dare!" she barbed.

"Oh I, I didn't mean . . ." he stammered.

She gave him a look which froze him dead. Only a woman can give that hard flat stare, absent of any human quality.

"But I, I . . ."

"Isn't Winnie enough for your boorish tricks?" She knew of Winnie? "Open up that door! Wash these things and bring them in! . . . if Casanova can deign to wash anything."

Quarrel pushed the door open: "Can I come in?" he asked.

"O thank goodness! just in time!" Kari sighed like a cornered lamb.

"What!?" said Quarrel. But Kari had gone. Happy: she joined the others. 'Just the man, just the man' she thought. Quarrel was aghast. After only a few minutes and their own friend's sister-in-law! Flash Rod too! Quarrel had never liked that fellow. He had always thought there must be something . . . The snakes! Must watch Tiny even: and now Flash!

"Here, give me those things!" and he seized some cups from Flash and returned to the happy room away from that. He only hoped Kari would be sporting and not tell the others or let it spoil the evening: though it must have spoilt it for her, poor girl. She had looked so relieved. Whatever had made him feel he must go in just then? He often got these, these . . . telepathy he thought. At least the man would be going to South Africa in a few months time! Didn't want that type here. If Quarrel hadn't seen it himself he would never have believed it . . .

Kari was back in the other room in the best of moods and was attentive with charm to all those funny

students. Quarrel whispered to her later 'Are you quite sure you're all right?' And she said 'It *was* sweet of you, Geof; it *was* *such* a shock,' and she squeezed his arm so lightly.

Kari grew brighter: she blossomed out. She went twice to her room for her 'Shocking-plus-something' perfume. She listened to everyone and joined in, sparkling: she told Mark it didn't matter in the least when he took her in a corner and told her about her chemistry set. 'What a child he is!' And he said: 'Kari, you're burnishing. You go in and round us like molten glass tonight. And just as hot,' he whispered.

"And when set, just as cold," she whispered back.

And the leaning willow of a Tiny said to her, "You're doing us all a lot of good."

But Pills and Kari had gone into a competition. Each had just read an ancient French historical work.* Each one would tell a tale from it in turn. The one that told the last tale could demand any one single thing of the other he or she wished and the other must comply.

"Hadn't you better ask Roland's permission?" asked Quarrel frightened. Now it was the bouncy Pills he had to watch!

"Roland doesn't mind," said Kari. "I begin: Four hundred years ago the Queen of Navarre drank from her dead lover's skull. Your turn."

"My turn," laughed Pills. "Four hundred years ago the Lord of Dalmatia made his wife sleep with her dead lover till she died from the stench."

"Here I feel sick," said Quarrel. "Roland do something about it, can't you? You're the master here, aren't you?"

"Shut up Quarrel" said Kari. "Now it's my turn. Four hundred years ago," she said, "a queen who lived in the Hotel de Nesle in Paris, watched the passers-by,

**The Lives of Gallant Ladies* by the Abbé Brantôme (1540-1614).

and she called in all she fancied. She enjoyed them, then she had them thrown from the top of her roof into the Seine below."

"That is women all right," said Tiny.

"Four hundred years ago," continued Pills, still laughing, "a Magyar married but kept his fonder lover in the room beneath his bridal suite. Having enjoyed his wife he retired downstairs and before enjoying his beloved he knocked on the ceiling and cried 'Your health wife!' Whereupon next night the wife arranged to have her lover at hand and when the husband repeated the performance, she, beginning to enjoy her own lover who had come out of her cupboard, cried back 'And, yours, husband!' Whereupon the husband, furious past all control, rushed upstairs and slew the newcomer."

"And that's men all right!" said Kari glaring at Tiny. "Now one for me. When Cleopatra entertained Mark Antony, she dropped flower-buds into his wine, then before he could drink it she called over a slave. The slave drank the wine and fell dead. 'If I didn't love you,' said Cleopatra, 'I could then have been shot of you, but I know how miserable my life would be without you'"

"There was a Prince of Albania," Pills said, "who told a husband to say goodbye to his wife before he killed him, as he wished to marry his wife. The man went up and broke his wife's nose 'Then at least you won't enjoy the sight of her as I have done'."

"My turn!" said Kari rushing in quickly, "Monsieur de Gua"—how she was warming, enjoying the game—"said in 1500, that there was no delight like vengeance, and nothing sweeter than sleeping with the wife of a man he detested."

"O dear, now I only know rather a rude one," said Pills.

"Rude?" cried Quarrel. "Then I'd like to know what's been going on before?"

"It doesn't matter. Come on, let's have it. I know plenty more!" said Kari. "And you don't. Hee! Quick, quick!"

"Do you? O dear," said Pills, bounce running out, but still smiling. As long as she only asked him to kiss her as penalty that would be alright . . . "Well, Fu Cha, King of Wu, said he couldn't help observing how, when two little rabbits went hopping along, if one of them stopped the other hopped on."

"Then there was Faustina, wife of Marcus Aurelius," rushed in Kari; "the only way they could cure her of the sickly heat she felt for one gladiator was to kill him then give her his blood to drink."

"Here, what *is* this?" cried Quarrel. "I'm going to the lavatory. It seems the best place. Roland can't you stop it?"

Roland gave a failing smile. "Leave us alone; your turn, your turn," said Kari now beginning to get very excited.

"In the letters of St. Jerome," continued Pills, "it says that in 400 A.D. a Roman who had had twenty-one wives was compelled to marry a woman who had had twenty-one husbands. The man survived the longest whereupon all Rome feasted him, and placed a laurel crown on his head and a palm in his hands."

"Two gallants were fighting it out with swords for the love of a courtesan, Agiatus," hurried in Kari, "Agiatus stopped them saying: 'The wrong metal, gentlemen. Gold, not steel, is the metal that decides these matters.' Now this is your last one that you'll be able to remember Havoc! And I know *hundreds* more. *Hundreds*. *Hundreds*. *Hundreds*. I'll win! And you must do *anything*; you haven't got a chance!" cried Kari.

"Well, at least I might as well say this one," said Pills very feebly, "though bother you little lady, you just stole one I had thought of . . ."

"Goodie! Goodie! You only know one more. You can't think of any more. Can't, can't, can't!" She put her hand on his knee and said "Heeeee!"

"A man declared to a courtesan in Rome that he thought of her every night and that was enough for him. So she took him to court for cheating her out of her professional pay," Pills began. "The judge gave the case to the courtesan but saying 'But the money given you shall be imaginary money, which we shall wave in our imagination in front of your eyes in the same way as your professional services were imaginary to your beloved'."

"Now here's one more just to beat you," cried Kari. "It was in 1420 in Pampeluna, when the Christians—the Christians, not the Nazis—first thought of the idea of pinning the eye-lids back so that they could never close again."

"What a heinous one to finish with," said Tiny. "My goodness I think I'm glad that's finished."

"Can't Pills think of one more?"

"No—no he can't, he can't think of any more! Hee!" cried Kari and she rested her hand on Havoc's knee again looking at him and saying "Say you can't. Say you can't," she said.

"I can't," said Pills.

"Well, well, well: now what's the fellow to do?" asked everyone.

"That's my business," said Kari. "I'll tell him privately later. And that's only to be between us. He's never, never to tell anyone, anything, ever."

"Here, what sort of a game is this?" barked Quarrel. "Don't like the sound of it myself. I'm glad I didn't play any game."

"That's a fraud Mrs. Wilde, that's a fraud," said Tiny. "Getting us all excited for nothing."

"Then I can keep you all excited by never letting you know, can't I?" she twinkled. And she took Tiny's hand.

"Here stop that! stop that!" cried Quarrel rushing forward. "Roland have you *no* control over your wife this evening? This is, this is . . . sinful . . ."

And Kari kissed Quarrel on his cheek laughing and said "I'm going to make tea and toast for everyone. Pills, come to the kitchen." And she pulled Pills out by the hand.

22

ROLAND and Mark went out buying beer.

Kari grew to her gayest mood.

"Here, ow! what are you doing?" and she had put a sticky pastry down Quarrel's back.

Then she kissed him.

But then Tiny came up.

"Mrs. Wilde, you've heard of Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Wilde: meet Mr. Hyde." And he held out his hand. Which she tickled with her nail instead of shaking it. "You are fast arousing him in me, Mrs. Wilde. Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde lived in the same house. Don't you think that was the pith of the story? In the same . . . body even? Wouldn't you say that that was the pith of the story Mrs. Wilde?"

"Certain of it Tiny." And his palm still being hung out she incised her nail in it.

"Meet Mr. Hyde again!" And he held out his other palm.

This was getting serious.

"Where is Pills?" said Quarrel.

"Don't interrupt," said Tiny. "My father is a bishop, Mrs. Wilde. I have his blood in me. So many sons of the best of men become the Mr. Hydes of the sons of Dr. Jekyls. I have both bloods to contend with. One is pure. But very cold. The other is stronger, fiercer, livelier, finer but . . . Hydish."

"Have *you* seen Pills?" Quarrel turned round and jerked at Flash Rod.

"I think he went home," said the South African in almost his first sentence.

"Home? But we were all to go together. Has he gone home?" he asked the others.

"Mrs. Wilde," said Tiny. "Your mouth is like a Cupid's bow and your eye-brows are corals cut in pearl. Somewhere down the corridor of a relationship one has always to say to the other 'Mrs. Wilde, can I call you by your first name?'"

"Of course you can Tiny dear," said Her Lusciousness.

"Might I remind you, Tiny, if I can interrupt a minute, in her husband's absence," said Quarrel, "that Mrs. Wilde is a respectable married woman?"

"And a bachelor is never too young to yearn," said Tiny.

"Mrs. Wilde," put in Quarrel approaching; "it seems that this loon is not to be trusted in your husband's absence."

"Are *you*?" she said like honey.

"Me? Certainly not." And he put his hand round the inside of his collar straining for air. "Anyhow there are too many lights on. But this loon . . ."

Tiny, holding Kari's two hands, said "A loon is a migratory water-fowl noted for its diving. I ask you, Mrs. Wilde, am I a loon?"

"An elephant then," said Quarrel. "O they're

holding hands! Sin, sin."

"An elephant takes sixty years to fall in love. Look into my eyes, Mrs. Wilde, and tell me, am I an elephant?"

"Did I tell you about my inventions of hell, Tiny?" Kari asked.

"No," said Tiny. "What are they Mrs.' Wilde?"

"I have about a hundred," said Kari. Still holding hands. "There's the bathing suit that dissolves in salt water. The alarm clock that plays the Dead March as you wake up: the tea cup that goes off with a pistol shot everytime you tilt it to drink, and the arm-chair that plays God Save The King every time you sit down. Then there's the filing cabinet for Hitler with real people in it instead of their records: so that every time you want to know what Daladier or Schussnigg said in 1937, you just take Daladier or Schussnigg out of their files and ask them. Then there's the marriage laws: that every newly wedded pair must have a station bell tied under their bed: that all confetti must have glue so that it sticks. Then . . ."

Then Mark and Roland came in and the hand party was disbanded just as Tiny was about to put in an invention of his own.

"So Roland's going to Scandinavia for three months?" said Mark to Kari. "And you're going over for the last month? That's a funny firm he works for: sends him here, and sends him off again almost immediately. My good brother has asked me to act as chief entertainer to Her Highness in his absence?"

"And Geof and everyone!" said Roland warmly. "Just keep the lady happy and I'll be happy."

"O I have cousins in London," burst in Quarrel: "if you'd like to see anything of London, Mrs. Wilde? And then there's their wonderful little son, Tommie, I was telling you about. You'd love to meet him."

"After I have got my tickets for South Africa to-morrow . . ." Flash came in with courage.

"Whisky, Tiny? Or beer?" Kari asked sweetly, turning her back right against Flash. "And you Quarrel? Whisky or beer?"

"My mother," Flash was spluttering on, "sent me the money yesterday."

"Mark and Roland, beer also?" asked Kari coyly. "Goodie, goodie! now that's *everyone* fixed."

23

MARK wore a tie and went to Iris's grandmother's.

Conversation came like little leaves falling.

The tea party lay splashed all round the wall. Thin lips, drawn lips, old eyes, gimlet eyes, sour faces, dagger faces; thirty wizened maidens, four ageing bachelors, their young life Miss Iris and her young blood Mr. Mark.

"May we call you Mr. Mark . . .?"

"Do you think Miss Iris will mind . . .?"

"Have you heard this one?" and Mark asked the one about the two Americans.

"Two Americans crossing Waterloo Bridge: one was the father of the other one's son; what relations were they?"

"Miss Iris!"

And Miss Iris was called over to ask where her young man might sit for tea: and Miss Iris came up to find seventeen aged screwing their eyes up at the ceiling all over two Americans, and seventeen others begging them to give it up.

"We give it up," said the hardest lips—just pencil lines from a 3H pencil.

"Husband and wife."

"O very clever . . ."

“Very . . .”

Miss Iris was quite overwhelmed.

“Here’s the tea. Open the door for Alice, Iris dear.”

And Grandmother and Auntie and Iris and Alice and Mark all got locked up together in one corner.

“Iris so enjoyed your letter . . .”

“Pleasant weather . . .”

“I was speaking to the Dean on Thursday . . .”

“To the Dean . . .”

“Last night I looked at the moon,” said Mark, “and it shone a reflection all for me. If any of you wonderful people had been a hundred yards away it would have shone a reflection all for you. No one else could possibly have seen that exact reflection that was for me, as it is different for each one of us: and when I closed my eyes I think mine went. Isn’t it horrible that the world only exists in our own consciousness? I believe all you people are here, yet how can I be certain when I close my eyes for the last time that you will not also vanish as the moon’s reflection did? We can never know that there is any other consciousness beyond our own . . . the rest is chance, and maybe.”

“When did you last see the Dean? . . .”

“I was speaking to the Dean on Thursday . . .”

“He has such a marvellous library . . .”

“Pleasant weather . . .”

Suddenly Mark wondered what would happen if he ceased to be Miss Iris’s young man. She would have thirty-four sour reminders.

Did Mr. Mark play bridge?

“Yes, I know how to; but I really don’t care . . .”

Then Mark should make a four after tea.

“Mr. Mark plays bridge . . .” it was announced.

“That’s if Miss Iris can spare . . .” said Miss Innocent.

“Of course she can,” said Miss Knot.

Mark should not have come. He was not engaged to that young girl now knitting on the floor. She would be an old maid soon if she stayed here. Hockey captain and school champion at table tennis: how the devil did she become that from this?

And Mark played bridge.

“And played a remarkably keen game . . .”

“He played the two club convention throughout . . .”

“Very honest . . .”

“Very suitable . . .”

Mark had great luck and finished a rubber saying:

“We are being rude to the others . . .” and he closed the game and joined the others.

“Very considerate . . .”

“Do you know any more riddles?” asked the sharp Miss Keen, with a squirt of a Pom on her greasy lap.

“Yes. Do you know a four lettered word ending in c-n-y?” he asked. “Very simple, very common: you have only to add one letter in front.”

Thirty-four people raced through the alphabet.

“Penny,” said Miss Bluebell.

But thirty-three people explained that there were two ‘n’s’ in penny.

“Very easy?”

“Very common?”

“Deny,” said Mark.

“O wonderful.”

“Any more?” asked the sharp Miss Keen.

“A four lettered word ending in u-n-t. This is a good one,” he added.

Four or five hawk’s eyes turned on him.

Surely not . . .? thought Mark.

Someone said “Punt.”

“O it’s in the first half of the alphabet,” said Mark.

“Yes, I dare say it is!” said grandmother and walked out.

Things were becoming strained.

“What are you giggling at Miss Innocent?” asked Miss Knot.

“I know but I won’t say,” said Miss Innocent.

“Really!” said Miss Knot and rose from her seat.

Mark felt freezing: and then boiling.

Iris, simplicity itself, wondered what was happening to the atmosphere. She said brightly:

“Hunt.”

“But I’m quite sure that isn’t the word ‘Mr. Mark means dear,’ said Miss Knot standing as if she was balancing a family tree on her nose.

‘Hunt’ did seem pointless.

“No, it’s distinctly feminine,” Mark added.

“Really?”

“‘Aunt’,” said Mark.

“Really!”

Miss Innocent retired.

People turned their backs.

The men thought somehow that Mr. Mark should be shown the door.

“‘Aunt’,” said Mark again.

But no one listened. No one it seemed wanted to.

“But that’s marvellous!” said Iris from her knitting on the floor. ~

“Marvellous!” said Miss Knot stalking stately out, taking out with her her family tree secure on her nose. And somehow Mr. Mark *had* been shown the door.

PART III

MARK went on his hitch-hike to Italy, France and Austria but did not get the welcome back he had expected.

He had been away wandering about: and had thought of Kari and Roland continuously and of that delectable suite of theirs in Jermyn Street where all was cushions and comfort. His way had been hard, sleeping on the rough soil, staring by waterfalls for hours: but against his hardness he had put their comfort. He had written often to them and had always given an address they could have sent to. He had turned up hopefully time after time at Poste Restantes never to find a thing for him. Now a week before his return Roland had left for Scandinavia, and Mark had thought perhaps at least a card would come from some foreign part. But never a whisper. Having been out of his life for twenty years Roland had come and opened the door and then as casually, almost callously, gone off out again. Mark was sad. This was poor brotherliness. And here now before him Kari lay out all satin and scent. The room reeked. Whisky might have given him a welcome but no one else in this lone crazed world would. Just a quadruped, but he knew what a heart was for, and what coming back meant.

Often, often had Mark stood staring at the clear depth of Lake Garda or Como, dirty he was, dirty as the earth he trod, and he thought: how clean was the dirt of the fields and ways, and how dirty was the cleanliness of Kari. Scents, lipsticks, face creams, powders, juices, nail varnish, silk, satin, taffeta, lace

. . . give him God's air and God's land, strangle the boudoirs. Yes if Kari and he ever met on one or the other's doorstep 't was as near as they must expect.

Yet they, Kari and Roland—mostly Kari—had very quickly become his companions on this globe and he had sent them card after card and tramped mile after mile to Post Office after Post Office only to get not one line from either of them.

He had phoned from Victoria all cheers and smiles and Kari had purred out some "Oh dear. It's you? Yes look in. If you must."

And he had climbed the stairs still singing a little, but he had better have gone on to Clucktown: Aunt Mabel was not demonstrative but she would not have shown that flat, all-but-disappointed attitude at seeing him:

"Hallo Kari, why are you like this?"

"Because I want to be."

Something was up. A volcano was smouldering.

He kissed her, he couldn't resist that. He was always wanting to kiss her. For all these weeks he had thought about it. She was delectable. There might be a thousand miles of difference in their heads, but kissing her he did want.

"Gosh, I am glad to see you again," he said.

She said nothing.

"Kari is anything the matter?"

She leaned over on her back and blew smoke to the ceiling.

"What the hell?" he said. "Speak for heaven's sake."

"Why don't you come into my parlour, mm mm?" she said.

"What?"

She got up and standing over him as he sat, said:

"I'll get you!"

“What are you talking about?”

“I said I’d get you!”

“Get me? What on earth do you mean? How?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know? You’ll never know what goes on in here,” and she tapped her head with a claw. “Never.”

“I’ll be a rock against you,” he said softly. She was very near.

“Will you?” There was a short giggle like a gurgle at a sink. “Delighted to hear it I’m sure.” Another giggle. “The longer it takes the longer the fun. You’ll never know how scummie that all is.”

He stood up and shook her. “Has anything happened?” he shouted; “has anything happened?”

“You just didn’t know me before that’s all. Now you’re going to know a little about me. I believe that death is too good and too easy for anyone: I like to see a living-dying. I’ll tell you what my only food is in this world.”

He turned darkly away from her.

“Suffering,” she went on. “And you must get to like it, because I like people who like it.”

“Don’t Kari, don’t. You are . . .”

“Yes, go on say it!” she snapped.

“Nothing.”

“Ill! You wanted to say ill, didn’t you? Didn’t you?” she screeched.

“. . . I don’t know.”

“Yes you did, you wanted to say ill! But not as ill as you will be. Like your imbecile brother,” she went on standing over him. “I must tell you how I got him. And then I bleded him. Bleeded him for the dead Fuehrer . . . hee! Only I was his alive Fuehrer. Hee! Why don’t you listen? Didn’t you know that everyone who takes an oath to the great Fuehrer has to take it to smaller fuehrers as well because the great one can’t

always be present even if alive? Haven't they told you anything in this milk and water land of yours? Millions of Germans went through that bloodying thing. And to smaller fuchrers. Like your brother only a month ago. In the war we gave lovely young Nazis you prisoners to practise on. There were 2,000 Russian children at Dachau, they practised shooting them, maiming them. We, the Master Race. I had a little telephone box where I put a man, then we lowered the pressure down to nothing. I watched through a hole. His lung ruptured, he tore out his hair from its roots: we made lampshades from his hind . . . You must have read it . . . Ah! to watch a man for hours, he all the time thinking his every breath that he has to burst to get, will be his last! Did it to help the Air Force, you know: had to learn about high pressures. There's always a reason, Marky. Heil Hitler. That's why Frau . . . and I had little bets on who could be the most obscene. You won't listen?" She looked at his eyes. Her own eyes were catching a life at last.

To shut her up or what? To shut her up or let her have it out? He ground into the seat with his nails and bit his lip.

"When Himmler was asked about these things," she went on, "he said 'Make them as terrible as you can. The more terrible the less they will be believed.' Heil Himmler. We injected all the diseases and all the mixtures of diseases in people and then we watched them. Didn't you know all these things Marky? For science, you know. Hee! Cancer in the womb. Hee! Overdoses of morphine in the heart. Think about that. Think, think. You don't want to listen?"

He bit his lips nearly down to blood. Fine holiday he had had . . . now running out like a bottle of champagne with no bottom.

"We shrunk heads to the size of an orange. Can you

imagine that? Tiny's head to the size of an orange. Your head Marky, to the size of an orange." She touched his head.

"Don't touch my head!" he screamed and jumped up and rushed to the window. God he was sick that she had ever touched him at all. Or he, her.

"I'll remember that Marky," she said, and came and stood close behind him. Marky? And since, when Marky? How horrible! "We made shoes out of the skins of the heads of intellectuals. You won't listen?" she said as he started away again. "But this is my food. I love to watch hari kiri: Hiri Kari they called it everywhere I went: wasn't that sweetie of them? Who would live after I had treated him for a week? Eh Mark? We put a positive electric wire on a breast and the negative on the other breast. Or in the organs. You won't listen?" he was going up and down the room. "Why not write it all down?" she hissed. "Go on, write it down in a book that you can read it over again and again until it all sinks in! Here's a pen: go on, write it, write it!" she threw a pen down on the table: "Write it in a book that all can read. Go on, Marky, you've got my permission! These things happened you know? And that's where you must be careful. Don't write them down that I did these things and *revelled* in them: don't say that it's all been wine to me: O no. Marky, you mustn't do that; that's erotic, you know, perverted, pornographic and all that: O, no that would be censored. Say I did it for the Fuehrer, Heil," and she raised her hand, "say I did it to get statistics for the Army and Navy on how men died: say I got twenty-five medals for my services: that will be literature. Then everyone with their erotic itch can gloat in it, and it adds up to the same Marky . . . but you don't want to listen?" he was pacing up and down, up and down all the time. "Yet you *must*

you know? These things happened. Everyone has a right to know. Think of the millions who died Marky only with the hope that the world should know and now the world won't listen? Isn't that honey? Isn't that dicky? And think of the word, 'millions'. Not one, not two, millions, millions, millions! and the nearest any one darling got to a natural dying was when we starved him to death in a barbed wire fencing called the Rose Garden. You will listen because now things must be subtle. No fat concentration camps to feed our longing now. So we must turn from physical to mental now and I must get minds instead of bodies. We always had a soft spot for the intellectuals. Not that you are that! Good gracious! . . . But: to degrade them, you know. And to make them lose all respect for themselves. To make them tell on each other: to take the stool away from a friend who was trussed up to hang, to make them pass him and touch him after he was dead: then make them stare the dead man in the eyes for minutes and say 'I killed you. Heil Hitler'."

He stopped before her. Should he throttle her then and there? Should he smash her swinish gloating face in? And chuck her body down into Jermyn Street? And this happehed! The Master Race!

"Make a sensitive man tell on his friends for years, what is he then?" . . . She went on like a wound up engine, drilling it into him. "I like to think of those who are free now and can never forget what they did." Do you? No doubt they'd like to get at you! "But you won't listen? But you will! You must! Think of the millions who died only hoping that you would listen. It's important to know what we did."

He sat down on the divan. Head in hands.

She sat down beside him.

He buried his head deeply. The sun, the fields, the

waterfalls, the flowers . . . His holiday was being taken from him so quickly. And those in the camps . . . how they must have thought of the sun, the fields, the waterfalls, the flowers. *Did these things actually happen? Did human actually do this to human?*

“When you go home, think of these things, just think that they are happening to you. Try them, Marky. Just try. Clean the stairs with your tongue. Spread tales and lies against Tiny and Pills . . . or . . . Iris . . . because your Fuehrer tells you you must. But I grew tired of the obvious things,” she said, changing her tone: “beating, bone grafting, collecting garbage with the lips, muscle incisions, the iron helmets, peeling off nails slowly: those were things people got used to training for Hitler’s army: I came that I must soon have double twists: to tell a man that if he didn’t tell, his wife would be beaten to death in the next room, then have a woman beaten, screaming in the next room; he tells all and we show him it was not his wife at all . . .”

“Kari . . .”

“Tell a Jew he is to die and knock him unconscious then, as he wakes, stand over him in Nazi uniform and tell him he is in heaven, did he think he would escape Nazis there?”

“Kari . . .”

“Tell a man that if he tells all, he can go immediately to his wife and child and take each one a present from the store; he tells and you watch his darling surprise when you tell him he is for the gas chamber instead.”

“Kari! . . .”

“Hitler’s word ‘Nacht und Nebel’—Night and Fog: ah! think of that, think, think, think. Never to tell a prisoner or his family a thing, let them imagine they may be living still, heeee; Suspense and Mystery,

someone translated it. My Bible!"

"Listen . . ."

"And *you'll* never know. You'll never know anything. I'll be so that you'll feel so sick inside you you want to run from me forever, and then be so sweet, so sweet, you cannot leave such sweetness. That's exactly how it was with Roland. He ran from me forever. Then only two days later he was back. And now . . . And you'll never know the truth that's inside me for you, Marky. You won't even pass your exam unless I want you to . . ."

"What the *hell* are you talking about?"

"Hell. That's the very word. Self-made. You look in your books and you'll think of me. You'll look at your Construction and you'll think of Destruction and all that went on in the camps, and all I will tell you, and their screams, and you won't be able to work. You'll see. I will decide who out of you silly students will pass your exams . . .

"You'll see!" she hissed.

Then she went on: "Isn't that a clever piece of *Nacht und Nebel* about the disappearance of Hitler? Nobody really knows whether he is alive or dead. So we're all left free to begin a legend when and what and how it suits us. And legends are so much more powerful than facts you know? Look at the legend of the death of your Christ. O but I got tired of two twists and wanted three twists. Send a postcard from . . ."

"Shut up!! Shut up!! Shut up!! By heaven, Kari: what are you telling me?"

"I tell you only what happened and what you can read Marky in the reports. Haven't you read the reports? Everyone ought to read the reports."

"Shut up I tell you!!"

"When people took baths, gas came out. At Dachau we made men into cannibals and they ate each other."

“I will not hear you Kari!!”

“Now we have to be subtle. It’s like coming into a Prohibition country to come here. You ought to be sorry for us, Marky. And I certainly do get thirsty sometimes. So we must get people without their knowing it, mustn’t we? Let our friends feed us after we have taught them how. Listen Marky: war is war. By holding men down with sticks in tubs in freezing water tilb after sixteen hours they died and testing suits on them we saved a thousand brave German sailors from death at sea. By experimenting with the enemy’s gases on prisoners we might have saved thousands of brave German civilians: by sterilizing Jews and intellectuals we saved having trouble from future enemies of the German Reich: by destroying people by steam we learned what to do if brave German sailors were trapped in boiler rooms: by giving the prisoner youth to German youth we blooded the great German fighters: by experimenting on the scum and common criminals which Himmler said all prisoners were and finding that wet cold caused more suffering than dry cold we saved many thousand brave soldiers’ lives . . .”

“And how much did you experimenters do these things for the brave German people and how much for your own fun?”

“As much Marky as the Spanish Inquisition tortured thousands for religion: as much as your brave British settlers in Africa mutilated and tortured their black slaves for disobedience: as much as your Queen Mary burned Protestants to save their own souls: and can I say that we brought forward our own brave German criminals and told them ‘go ahead you’re the first race on earth’ and let them loose on the prisoners, because we learnt from your own brave British example of letting out the Black and Tans on

the Irish only twenty years ago Marky? . . . only twenty years ago Marky . . . And, now, what can we do? We so often got people for experiments by asking for volunteers, promising them something: and the poor dears volunteered. Won't you volunteer for an experiment? You must be sorry for we thousands who went through that and have to starve now. What can we do?"

"You can bloody well go and look elsewhere!"
And he actually laughed.

"No, we must come to our friends. You see they say all these things are in all of us: they only need stimulating."

"Stimulate me and I'll smash you into pulp."

"No, Marky, we all have many and opposite sides that can be stimulated."

"Then why don't you stimulate a pleasant side?"

"Because . . . I'm going to take it out of this world before I die."

"Can't you leave some people out?"

"Maybe. It depends how I feel.. You are very lucky: you are getting a warning: you can be on the look out."

"Thanks! and the moment I find the net and the weed laid before me, I'm out forever if not before!"

"Mm-mm. Does the fisherman tell the fish he's putting a net down? But don't worry, I'll let you know when it's too late so that we can watch you wriggle and me giggle. I like the wriggle part. Don't you? O no, you'll like my giggle part. Won't you Marky? I like to see a man struggle against something the poor darling can't break."

"You are giving me another fine sweet warning. Perhaps one day you'll sit in my lap and kiss my lips and slit my throat from behind."

"I don't cut throats. You might cut your own. But the most I would do might be to put Caladium

Sequinun, or something, in your tea, but you wouldn't taste it."

"And what would happen then?"

"I shouldn't tell you. Nacht und Nebel you know. Perhaps I've done it already. Who knows? You don't. You could never have any children as long as you lived after that. Perhaps you already can't . . . who knows?"

"Perhaps I had better put it into yours!"

"Yes Mark dear: but you'd have to get hold of it first. And Roland, who is an agent in, shall we say, raw materials? might be your brother, but he's my 'obedient servant'."

A salt tear dropped to the carpet through Mark's hands.

A tear for his brother?

A tear for humanity?

Kari trod it in.

His hands were wringing wet!

Salt, salt were his tears.

2

WHEN Mark reached Clucktown to his amazement there was a telegram from Kari waiting for him. Would he go to see her?

No. He had decided she was cut clean from his life. But what is this wretched business now? Something has happened? Confound all things. He had decided that under no circumstances would he see her again, or at the least not till after his exams were over. If she hadn't poisoned his study for them entirely already! . . .

What was this telegram? He would like at any rate to miss this one month. Then he might face her again. And Roland? O to hell with what Roland had said.

Look after her? My God! To hell with him. What's the good of a brother who can't even send another brother a postcard? To hell with them both!

What *was* this telegram? O dear, he might go. Curse her. Curse her.

3

CRAM. Cram. Cram.

What was this cramming? Just text-books to be swallowed from cover to cover: not even masticated, just thrown down *in toto* to be belched up on paper in a few weeks' time.

And this was the test. Belching. Sicking the muck up.

Jaggard and Drury's Building Construction: out popped Kari: Bannister Fletcher's History of Architecture: out popped Kari: A. D. Turner's Applied Building Mechanics: out popped Kari. All infallible. Why infallible? Mark liked to question everything, as he didn't like the edict that text-books were infallible. And here was Kari popping out at every page already. The witch. What was that telegram? He supposed he'd have to get that off his mind before his mind could settle to this cramming.

Mark studied in a morass of darkness. His subconscious was an eternal why and allowed no progress until every why was answered. It had been two years ago when Mark had asked Leary, the Mechanics master, 'What is a moment?' And then he had asked everyone else. And he still asked. No one told him: they all tried to. But at every mechanics lesson his subconscious still asked 'what is a moment?' Yes, moments of resistance, of inertia, bending moments, all those, but what is that very thing itself, a moment? When he knew that he could continue. But not until. His was the slowest memory there was: it would not

step until all the whys had been answered: certainly when he knew he knew for all time but then that was hardly necessary for examinations. In Matriculation one question only out of sixty, the English essay, had called for his imagination. Now he could not understand how in Architecture the memory and not the imagination should again be Saint Almighty. And his memory would not function: it set everything aside until its brain had asked the whys: and no one answered the whys: and now thrust at him was an extra bloody why about a bloody telegram.

Mark *must* cram.

He *must* pass this examination.

He stood in the queue for the theatre for Shaw's *The Man Of Destiny*, his Specifications in his hand.

"An architect must . . . a builder must . . . she's beautiful in front, two people up . . . an architect must . . . hang it, she's looking at me . . . All water used on this site must be passed by the architect. I say, I must mark that one for Tiny . . . she *is* a picture; shall I tell her that?" .

Then, yes he really *did* progress a little.

But his fellow students showed no recognition of his efforts as they were cominciencing their own cramming too.

Pills had been seen at school. But he had lost his bounce.

4

IN three days Mark went up again to Jermyn Street.

Mark went in and waited for Kari: the usual rotten wait.

She was a little quicker. But she was never dressed when he called.

He wouldn't wait long. Enough of this!

She came.

“Did you get my telegram?”

“Yes.”

She was very quiet. The volcano had smouldered away. She was so quiet that sometimes he could hardly hear her.

“I have to tell you something.”

He nearly asked her to repeat that but he caught her sentence on its second time round the lousy room.

“I have to tell you something that happened.”

Eh? O happened, yes. He heard. Was it her mouth, or what, she was speaking through? Sounded like a grave speaking through its tombstone.

“In 1943 a girl was living in Paris. She was sixteen. Or fifteen at first. I suppose she looked more because offers of marriage came nearly every day. This girl lived alone. She had no mother and no . . . father.” She was a long time saying that. Come on tombstone, buck up with the bloody story: here’s a fellow who’s got to learn nine varieties of sewerage farms and seven varieties of stone bonding before this night. “She had no friends really, and never any relatives. Someone made violent love to her and pursued her night and day. He was forty-six. She could not shake him off and she began to loathe him. He became weaker and weaker and started making a fool of himself. He started to divorce his wife. A friend of his gave the girl a revolver to protect herself with. He became so horrible and revolting that one night she drew out the revolver.”

Why there are two buses having a race down Piccadilly!

Funny ghost and earthy voice this of hers; really from the grave.

“I shot him.”

Blimey, that was a near thing: the 14 bus just squeaked in front of the 96 and won!

The voice from the other world had said . . . "I meant to shoot him, you had better know that. I thought I would see if he would be manly when he saw the revolver, when he realised I had shot him."

"Manly?" he said.

"Yes, manly."

"Was he?"

"No. I watched his eyes. I wanted some sign from him. He didn't look . . . anything. He just, well, gave in. I didn't like him for that. I wanted him to show something manly . . . when, when he had realised I had, done it. It was in me to kill him, I am telling you that."

The emotion that boiled in each of them! Yet calmly, so quietly and calmly they spoke.

"How . . . how do you feel about it now Kari? Do you feel . . . sorry for him . . . or it?"

"No. No I never think of him. No I don't feel sorry. I didn't like him. I might have a little, if he had somehow been a man at the end."

It is a graveyard. That was a tombstone voice. A grey voice, without blood, without colour.

"It is still with me."

"What is Kari?" he asked softly.

She thought, he has called me by my name again at last! and she felt pleased.

"His wife and his brother—Krautz is their name—trace and track me everywhere. They saw me in the street after the war and have hounded me ever since. They have even tracked me to London and in this last week . . . Mark"—she would use his name too—"they have sent me one large rubber ball, which if bounced would have blown this whole hotel up, and one large box of beautiful chocolates—poisoned."

"My God!"

"I wanted to tell you, that I meant to kill him."

She had not got him here to ask for pity. The rubber balls and the chocolates were her worry: she had not meant to mention them. But she had a story to tell.

And had told the beginning.

“Kari . . .”

“Perhaps you will let me go on a minute, Mark? Perhaps . . .”

“I want you to know something Kari.”

“What?” Don’t give me a lecture in mercy’s name.

“It’s impossible to know these things, until they actually happen to you: I mean, how I would feel your telling me of this. I would have thought I would have been so horrified. I can’t explain it, but this, this that you tell me just to-day . . . I feel nothing. It makes no difference. I am on your side. I don’t know why. But on your side in this, Kari.”

She went to the window again, and in a voice, less than a whisper, lower than the grave, but covering, in its all but silence, a cry that rent all heaven open, she asked, “Don’t you think, Mark, because I meant to do it, that I must be insane?”

And with a shout that nearly frightened her from her wits, he sprang to her and with hot tears bursting from his eyes: “And half the millions of this world have just completed trying with every devilish skill they can to kill the other half!—*that they have never seen or heard*: strangers, do you understand me? as loving and human as they themselves are! And you expect me to turn round and tell a woman—no a girl—who put a bullet through a man she loathed, that she is insane? Then in God’s holiness what were the others; what, I ask it, is sanity? Is there a breath of it in this world? The Bismarck with 4000 on board was sunk at ten miles distance by men who even through binoculars could

scarcely envisualise—and therefore feel—those 4000 as more than ants? Is there sanity in that? O yes war, war! But is there *sanity* in it? Millions of decent people slaughtering millions of decent people. *And that they have never seen or heard.* And you, put stop to the attentions of a man who would not leave you alone. Kari, in this is no insanity.” And he had calmed down now.

From the edge of a thousand emotions she still half whispered.

“I have thought perhaps there was insanity in my family and I cannot help it.”

“You were sixteen. Or even fifteen, you said. Even the law will not condemn you at that age. The murderer is he who gave you that gun.”

She turned on him. Ran to the other corner of the room to which he had wandered. Buried her head against his breast. And sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

“How do you know? How do you know?”

“Why; am I right?” he said, trying to brighten a little.

“How do you know? How do you know? O Mark, you can save me yet. Go away!” She pushed him away. “I have to tell you something, and I have to tell you standing alone, two separate people, and no contact. I will not even look at you while I tell you.”

She turned. My gracious, she was serious! What in the hell was she going to say?

“Mark.”

“Yes?”

“Mark; you’re a funny fellow. Earthy. You have very little that other people have got. You have filthy shoes . . . all things. But there’s something in you that I haven’t met before. And it’s from the earth in you. Uncouth, unclean, grub, nails blacker than black, love with you would be like love in a ditch. Mark . . .

keep it like that! I never knew that earth could be such a real thing." She sobbed again. She turned with tears in her eyes and coming, once more her head at his breast: "If I ever . . ." and she picked at a button on his coat, "hurt you, Mark, I would be lost forever."

5

"MARK, you said that he who gave me the gun, was the real murderer: why did you say that?"

"It's obvious."

"Is it? You have no idea how glad I am to hear you say it."

"A man of forty doesn't give a girl a gun to save him from another man of forty."

"Couldn't he? Not as protection?"

"A gun is a murderous implement. He was the murderer."

They had been sitting down. Kari stood up and faced Mark.

"Do you want to know why I am glad you say that?"

"Yes?"

"The man I shot was an S.S. officer who was due to be liquidated, and the officer who gave me the gun had been detailed off to do it."

Mark said "O what a pretty world. Now I think of Whisky, now I think of this: and I don't understand how God can put down the loveliest, heartiest, dearest little quadruped on to the same globe as these things." After a pause he said: "Then the other man was the murderer, wasn't he? In the eyes of heaven shall we say?"

"A dirty, shoddy one, getting a little orphan . . ."

"Are you an orphan?"

"Worse. You are an orphan, Mark. I am unwanted.

You wouldn't think it could be all that much worse would you? Let's go out, I have to tell you something else."

"Where to?"

"Somewhere very, very nice."

"If you had four hours to spare I would suggest Hampton Court."

"Take a young lady with a fight inside her to Hampton Court, Mark. I'll be ready like lightning."

She turned back at the door and tried to force a smile: "Lightning means half-an-hour. Better make our usual tea, eh?"

6

In the kitchen he made tea.

She came to the door and turning in against the jamb as if speaking to it and holding one hand tightly against it she said:

"Mark, I shouldn't ask you, but . . ."

He couldn't hear her; her voice had faded right away.

"Please excuse me, could you repeat it, I couldn't hear?"

She bit her lip, turned right in against the jamb with both hands on it and turning right from him, in a voice flat, colourless, toneless, less than a whisper from a distant world, said:

"About what I did in the camps. Don't you think that that shows I must be insane?"

"There is nothing insane about you, Kari."

"But what I did . . . It comes over me you see, wanting to do it."

Verdict on a life. 5ft. 3in. of human form, cold and scarcely breathing against a door, asking for a verdict before the only Court of Justice she had come so

quickly to care a mote about.

Mark would have lied. Had he only told one lie in all his life he would have told it then. But he did not.

Because he did not answer.

She turned away to leave. "I should not have asked," she said.

"Kari."

He was going to say something! She paused but said nothing.

"*I am going to tell you a story, Kari.*"

She returned to the protection of that door jamb again but would not face him as she listened to his story.

"Twenty or twenty-five years ago, I do not know exactly, a man of impeccable character, merry as a robin on a New Year's Eve, half danced his way home down the main street of his American town. Seeing his postman in front of him, for a lark he sprang upon him. They fell and the postman's leg was broken. The man, a clerk, was given ten years in jail. Being a perfect, though a brooding prisoner, he was released after seven years. On his first night out he robbed a bank. A policeman saw him. Faced in a flash with a whole nightmare future before him of years and years of more imprisonment or the possibility of freedom if he escaped, he shot the policeman, who died. Thereafter he resisted all efforts to arrest him by killing his pursuers. They say that killing came in his blood. They say that hate reached the pitch of insanity inside him.

"His name? . . . Dillinger. Public Enemy No. 1. I think it was Dillinger. I know it was a Public Enemy No. 1. I think this: Dillinger had to be stopped. And the criminal was his home town court who gave him that first sentence."

Quickly but still softly she said: "But . . . but, he did things in insanity?"

“Near insanity you mean?”

“Then near insanity.”

“If the American world had been big enough and said, Dillinger, we clean your slate, what sort of a citizen will you become? I think he would have become a perfect citizen of that country with never one more blot against his name.”

“How do you know these things, Mark?”

“What things? I know nothing.”

“How do you know these things, Mark? How do you know that . . . that . . . happened . . . to . . . me?”

“It could have happened no other way.”

“People are born bad.”

“People are just born, Kari. You said the other day that anything, any side, can be stimulated in a person. After our birth, what happens brings out this or that side.”

“I am bad, Mark.”

“Do you hate trees?”

“Trees, Mark? What a funny question. I love trees.”

“Flowers?”

“O I love flowers. I will never pick one from its stalk I love them so much.”

“Animals and birds?”

“I have spent whole days trying to save the life of a bird.”

“Water and all elements?”

“What a funny question, Mark. I love all the wind, the storm, the sun and even the soft breezes too. And why did you ask about water? When I go to the beach I try to feel which way the water would like to run in, then I dig a way for it.”

“Only humanity has hurt you: and you take it out of only humanity.”

He still faced the electric stove and she the jamb of the door.

"I had not thought of that." She was talking louder now, even a little inflection in her voice.

"You were not wanted," he went on. "Your first cry is to take it out of those who want you. You will teach them what it is to want. Like Flash."

"Like Flash?"

"Yes Kari, like Flash."

"But the camps?"

"That is where you overstepped even your bounds. For there they neither wanted you nor had hurt you. But . . ."

"But?"

"But I blame 'the small town American Court of Justice'."

"I think you have saved my life. At Hampton Court Mårk, I will tell you how the Court of Justice of a smalltown student was right."

"We mustn't forget the tea," he said, turning at last towards her and half smiling.

"Thank you!" she screamed and turned to face him then quickly rushed herself away for never never never in all her life had she said 'thank you' to any man before!

It was not to be.

Kari came to where Mark was taking his tea and with a coal darkness behind her eyes said:

"I can't go. I can't go, Mark. I must go out as quickly as possible. It was really fortunate I was not out. They are only in England a few hours."

"They? What mystery is this? It's always mysteries with you, Kari."

"Don't say it like that . . ."

"I didn't mean . . ."

“This is very serious: very serious indeed.”

He noticed that she was holding binoculars. What the devil went on outside these windows?

“Then we can’t go?” he said.

“We can, we can! I’ll be back. An hour: not more. Wait for me, Mark: oh please let’s go to Hampton Court.”

“Are you in great trouble, Kari?”

“Not really. I know it’s not me; not now anyhow. I had better not tell you anything about it. Well, just this. I have three troubles, Mark: I’m in three meshes, as it were. First there are the War Crimes’ Intelligence Services after me: then there is the Krautz family who are always after me: then there are our own people, the people I was with in Germany and Paris and who are still bonded together in South America, in many countries, only a little underground now, and it is these, this last, that have suddenly arrived in this country, just for some hours and I am to go and see them. It may be news of new work, it may be that they have information that the Intelligence Services are about to fall on us, and we should scatter. These are the ‘important people’ I must see.”

“Three bloody meshes,” said Mark. “And I am supposed to be studying hard for peaceful exams.” He shouldn’t spend a moment more than necessary here.

“O just to-day, just to-day, Mark! To-day won’t make any difference. I told you anyhow I will decide who will pass the exams.”

“Kari, please.” He wanted to laugh.

“Don’t laugh at it, Mark. You’ll see. Just for to-day?”

“I’ll go out for a walk. An hour you think?”

“It’s difficult to say. But I might be back in an hour.”

MARK went through Princes Arcade, out into Piccadilly, along past Green Park to Hyde Park Corner, back down Green Park to the Palace, along the Mall, into Trafalgar Square and into the National Gallery. He had not long, as he had soon to be back, but when very young he had had an affair with a very young lady in an old Italian painting. She had told him she was tied forever in her canvas and he had promised to come in often and tell her how the world was growing."

He hunted for her in her canvas and at last came to her. It *was* a girl: though the picture said St. John that was rubbish. He would just explain he only had a few minutes. She was always sad if he only had a few minutes. He had stared (in conversation) with her so often he had often been asked about it by other gallery visitors: he always got angry and had told no one the truth.

There was Kari beside his picture! In the name of God!

"In the name of God!" he rushed up. "Kari, Kari!" She was white. Sick white. Horrible. Lightless like the earth under a stone that is rarely raised.

"Kari! Kari! In the name of God! How did you get here?"

"I had to see you."

"How on earth did you know I was here?"

The little St. John looked down on them.

"Didn't you say you were coming here?"

"I had no intention . . ."

"Then don't ask me. I just knew. Come and buy me a brandy quickly, Mark."

The little St. John saw them leave, Kari mostly crumpled into Mark's arms, but she, St. John, was

glad—or Mark had thought so—because even then Mark had not forgotten to look up and say “Sorry, sorry. I’ll come back terribly, terribly soon.”

The most incredible peace Mark had ever had in his life were those times talking with St. John.

Kari seemed drained of blood and began shaking. “They threatened to shoot me,” she said. “Whipped the guns out, they did, they did. Gave me sixty seconds to tell. My first thoughts were, I want to go and tell Mark.”

He more than half supported her. Luckily it was licensing hours already. She had her brandy and they sat.

“I am,” she said, “rather a tough. I didn’t know I would ever feel afraid. If you had told me I would have felt like this, I would never have believed you. But I think, anyone, don’t you? when they put two guns a yard from you, suddenly, and start counting sixty, I think, anyone, don’t you? would be . . . worried?”

He laughed. “That’s a mild word. I’d leave my skin. I think.”

“I should have thought my sang-froid would have stayed: and my thoughts should have been collected too: but they weren’t.”

“But you . . . you got away?”

“O no, I told: that’s what’s terrible.”

She didn’t seem to want to say anymore.

“Dared they have done it? And where?”

“O, it was in a hotel. O yes. They had silencers. Their aeroplane was at the airport. They may be out of the country already. Only in for four hours altogether.”

“They could have got away with it?”

“O yes, of course. You don’t understand these things do you Mark? but some murders are ‘excused’ so that others can be ‘excused’.”

“O dear, O dear,” said Mark: “Whisky gets further and further away from the same world as you every hour. Soon you won’t even be in the same universe together.”

“I’ve never seen Whisky,” she said. “Can I have another brandy? Make it two more, Mark. Then I’ll be all right. I don’t know how I managed to reach you.”

“An afrit is my only explanation.”

He fetched the brandies.

“Do you still feel you can go to Hampton Court?” he asked.

“O do let’s, shall we? I can go. I’ll be all right after this. It’s not too late, is it?”

“No.”

“I didn’t tell all,” she said. “But I didn’t mean to tell anything. I don’t think it’s right.”

“I don’t quite understand. You have some . . . information? Don’t tell me anything you’d rather not.”

“Well, there are many of us ‘on the run’—don’t you say that? And we are really all bonded together. These are head men and they wanted to know where three others are and if I didn’t say they’d shoot me. Only, you see, these three are blackmailed in, just as I am and are trying to get clear of the whole organisation: that is why I was determined not to tell. There’s the old organisation and it’s still going on with leaders and everything: and we’re all bonded in that: only there are some that are trying to take this chance to escape this old organisation and I feel my greatest bond is with them.”

“Yes,” he nodded.

“I know all these three,” she said. “I told them of one. I wish I hadn’t: but it was awful like that. I managed to save the others.”

There was a pause.

“They are coming again,” she said. “Next time they come they will think out a secret way of telling us whether we are safe here or whether the Intelligence—the War Crimes’ Intelligence—has caught up with us and we should all scatter. They’re coming during the last week in June.”

“That’s the week before my exams,” said Mark.

“When do you go away?” she asked. “You do go away?”

“Just for a time,” he said. “I’m to be one of the crew on an exploration ship that goes to Greenland for some months. It leaves from Belfast of all places. No office will see me inside as prisoner until I haven’t a farthing left. I go one week after the exams are over.”

“They will be here in the middle of the week,” she said. “I already know all about it.”

“Anything you can tell?”

“Well it will be at the corner of Piccadilly Arcade and Piccadilly on that Thursday at eight o’clock in the morning. Two men are going to stand there. All of us must pass within ten minutes. If one has a newspaper under his arm we must scatter because we are all wanted: if it’s in his pocket we can rest, all is well, and with luck, it might stay so. It’s very important.”

“I think I’d write that down, I’d be scared of getting it wrong or muddling it.”

“We must never write a thing of any sort down.”

THEY went to Waterloo.

From Waterloo they went to Hampton Court.

At Hampton Court they crossed the Thames to the Palace. They took the walk to the Great Gatehouse, over the moat by the Henry VIII bridge, through to

the Green Court under the Astronomical Clock above Anne Boleyn's Gate, through the Clock Court, through the Fountain Court, out to the Gardens, the Broad Walk, the Long Water . . .

"I have been here ten times," said Mark, "and have yet to go inside the building. The gardens: I am crazy about the gardens."

The sexciting, supple-as-water Kari, waddled in her alarmingly sexciting supple-as-water way by the side of the long ragamuffin Mark. The flowers at Hampton Court held a beauty beyond compare. The lawns were made for princes and princesses. And a student strolled over them with a Princess beyond them all. All turned to stare at that flower of flowers that strolled by that tree of trees on that sunny afternoon. All wondered that she who was so perfect in dress and beauty should keep company with he whose trousers had a thousand creases but not one where the one should be. Like a doe and a boar: like Miss Champs Elysées and an Aran Islander. And the boar was proud of the doe but wished she would go out hiking where the boars go sometimes: and the doe was proud of the boar only wished he'd clean his nails sometimes. Young breasts she had, carriage she had, poise she had. The world stopped to watch her pass. The world was hers: but God save us! what had she for the world? Why, she would like to bind all humanity to a Winter with hoops of iron; yet behold, she steps out among it like a Summer in a harem.

Who could have guessed one minutest part as they passed there down among the flower beds, over the lawns to the wrought-iron gateways that led out to the Long Water, she more mucous than satin, he tall and gaunt, his body thin and wasting, his arms and legs four willow saplings, hair all over the place in ocean waves, his eyes and whole texture, mountain iron?

Who could have guessed one minutest part of the conversation that fell between them?

Who could have guessed that the black figure that plodded fifty paces behind them all the time, had tracked her ever since she had first left Jermyn Street?

10

Now the story would begin. They had talked of every other thing till then.

“Yes Kari?” She clutched his arm tightly.

“I . . . I was arrested after I had . . . killed the officer.”

“Yes, Kari, but you were so young. Surely your small years protected you?”

“Yes, from death, yes.”

“And . . . but couldn’t you claim self-defence?”

“I did.”

“And?”

“They proved that the bullet was shot from ten paces. I had claimed it had been during a struggle.”

“O.”

“There was no sentence passed,” Kari went on as they walked by the water down to Bushy Park, “I was just put into prison to await trial.”

“And?”

“The prison was raided and I was taken out. I was driven out by S.S. guards as far as the hills of Cormeilles. They stopped the car and said, while we were all standing around on top of the hill, that I would be getting twenty years minimum for this or I could work for the S.S. and be free. Twenty years Mark would have made me thirty-six at least before I was out. All my youth, my girlhood, young womanhood would

have been over. I would even be there now, Mark."

"Simple, isn't it?" he said bitterly. "Do they get many like that?"

"O yes, all. It was a rule of the S.S. that if you didn't have a criminal record you must go out and get one. No member of the S.S. was accepted unless. There must be no lane left for escape, said Himmler."

"I am on your side forever, Kari! I cannot stand these things!"

"A large number of most secret services are got like that."

"Are they?"

"Of course. The Nazis had very few new ideas. They only applied them stronger."

"And so you started, Kari?"

"What would you have done?"

"It's not easy to say unless I was faced with it. But what you did is exceedingly easy to understand. I would rather not say until I was faced with it what I would have done."

"I would have been . . . old . . . wouldn't I, when I had come out?"

"Twenty years, and the best twenty years, would have gone."

They rounded the base of the water and turned back up towards the Palace. For a moment Kari thought again of that black figure following them as he stopped and pretended to play with the water. What an amateur. So very much of her life seemed to be spent with someone following her.

"I was sent in as a decoy at first," she continued. "Just to mix with the other prisoners. To tell and to watch, and to work them up against each other. It was a women's prison. I hated it. I began to work for myself. I made love to the commandant. The first chemical experiments were the biggest thrills of my

life. I have plunged my hands through the brains of men and had a thrill that some must get by eating cream.”

CRAM. Cram. Cram.

Against odds.

Shrill voices piped shopping all the morning; John Couts practised his piccolo all the afternoon; the badminton enthusiasts thudded away in the shed-hall all the evening. Miss Cheeseholm turned up on the opposite side of the road and Mark was informed that “Drake Has Sailed For The West, Lads”—only he could never quite seem to get away: her aunt accompanied her—it would seem in a temper: all the neighbours cut all their lawns all the day all round him and Mark could pull grass out of his skull. Whisky whined for fun, an Unbeliever in examinations. Mark jammed cotton wool in his ears, rammed earphones over, thrust a blanket round: yet still he heard the price of tomatoes, the piccolo being drawn through his head like a wire, the shouting of the players, Drake still sailing, the mowers mowing up his mind, and the whining of Whisky. But even so he managed to learn the bonding of bricks, the casing of steel stanchions, the seven varieties of skylights, the eight varieties of lavatory seats, the dry rot, the dead rot and all rot. It might not be all rot but there was something 1850-ish about this Construction. Why fail an examination through not knowing details of a casement window when the things ought to be abolished by law? And why this cramming, jamming it down like filth into a dustbin when any normal architect would look the matter up when he required it? ’

But he *must* study! Out popped Kari’s face and said

“heeeee!” and disappeared before Mark could hit it.

“I’ll be so that you’ll feel so sick inside that you’ll want to run from me forever, and then be so sweet, so sweet, you cannot leave . . .” “I put my hands through the brains of someone who only the day before I had been friendly with . . .” “I want those darling people who beat themselves, and torture themselves as the Trappists: and those who wall themselves up and depend on us for their feeding as the Anchorites: and those who wither their arms or corrode their eyes for the love of God . . . or me perhaps?”

Get out of my bloody pages! “Naughty word, I’ll remember you said that, Marky . . .”

And that’s what happened! Within a week he was sickened of her and within a week wooed back. Just as she had said. How the hell could Mark know how genuine she was? She had sickened him out and sucked him back. It all *sounded* genuine: but by God it would have had to, so sickened had he been. He’d doubt her till his last day on earth. “You’ll never know the truth that’s in there for you,” she had said tapping her head. What was he to believe? Was that all an act? No: he believed every word: yet, believing it, it could still be the act to win him back. ‘The fisherman doesn’t tell the fish he’s laid the net.’ Get out of my pages! I’m studying the Manufacture of Cement.

“Sent letters supposed to be from the prisoners to their wives ‘please come and bring the children, there’s work, home . . .’ Then when they came . . . Heeeeee!”

O hell! he got up. Kari, you’re a swine.

And when he did get back to Cement Iris began jumping out of the pages scoring winning goals at hockey . . . once Mark had played centre half against her. And then the whole mop of Joan’s tiger tawny curls tickled his cheeks.

Dames and exams don’t mix. Leave me alone, ladies!

When a little boy gets down by the fireside on a winter's evening and takes out his book of fairy-stories and reads of princesses in towers he envisualizes just such as this little Joan: cheeks of red roses cupped in snow, a smile that lights the dark, a Dresden China figure; in character perhaps neither strong nor weak—(how could Mark know?—he hadn't even spoken to her yet)—yet certainly one who is sought for, fought for, and won. And Mark, though he was endeared to the wind and the rain, and happier on an ocean, in a desert or in a field than in a drawing room, yet still he had just that sentiment of that little boy and his fireside, and how he would have died for, and fought for Joan tomorrow! If only they could have produced a dragon in Clucktown!

12

LATE that night came a sinister telephone call. Aunt Mabel had long since retired.

“Mark, this is Kari speaking.”

He had left her young asps' lips cased up in cement.

“Mark, I must speak softly. Can you hear me?”

“Yes, Kari.”

“You remember I mentioned rubber-balls and chocolates . . . and . . . and Krautz?” she whispered.

“Yes, Kari.”

“The brother of . . . of Krautz if you understand me, is coming over. Do you understand?”

“Yes, of course.”

“He's coming during the last week in June.”

“The week before my exams?”

“Yes, Mark. But the same week as something else—the *other* side of it—as the old organisation.”

“Yes, Kari: that's what I meant actually.”

“If I could get out of London I could let the first

person—the brother, think I had really gone to South America or somewhere, and I might be free of him forever, and all that family. Could you, could you possibly Mark . . . I know it's a lot to ask, could you possibly do the other for me? It's terribly, terribly simple: just walk past: go past in a bus if you like. Or stop still and have a long stare. There's nothing to it: it's very easy. The newspaper business, you understand me? To see if all is clear or if there is danger and we should all scatter."

"Yes, Kari. I thought it was so important?"

"It is. It is. I thought you could just ring me and say yes, or no, wherever I will be. That's all. Then I might get rid of the other and his wretched family altogether for always. Could you, Mark? That would be so wonderful."

"I suppose so, Kari." What the devil could he say? He loathed, loathed her for this: *so easy now* to study! With *that* on his mind! Was that all part of the plan too? Just to disrupt his studies? Golly, with the warnings he had had he would see only double meanings in every single thing she said or suggested from now on.

"It is kind. I *am* grateful," she was saying.

"What do you do when you are trying to study for examinations," he asked, "and you can't keep your mind off the ladies?"

"Am I one of them, Mark?"

"I'm not telling you. There are three of them."

"Then just send the other two to me and I'll take care of them in my own sweet way—you know how: and then there's only me to think of . . . isn't there, Mark?"

by six o'clock to call on Kari where his cousin would bring her wonder son and all would meet each other. Mark had refused to go, saying that swotting called him.

But Kari had three other appointments to keep before she would meet Quarrel, out of which she was only aware of two.

Mark had done something. He was not going to torture his memory with this newspaper-under-arm, newspaper-in-pocket game, so he had wandered far out to Steerin, an island in the River built by the Dutch in 1600 and surrounded by a great sea wall, and finding a blitzed house near the church of the village, had entered and scribbled on a broken rafter I.P.O.K.: U.A.N.O.K.: and he would return the day before he must go to London and refresh his memory: In Pocket O.K.: Under Arm Not O.K. Then he went away and dismissed it and freed his mind from that until the fateful appointment.

Yet another thing Mark did to help his mind on that other matter. Kari had achieved her objectives. She *had* entered his pages: and question after question kept springing to his mind that he wanted to argue out with her. They assumed such an enormity in his mind that the only way of getting them out was to make a list. So he began to fill one page and then another with questions, mostly, as Freud would have supported him, on the sex side of the issues: on her lusts and insatiable desires: on sadism being energy misplaced. He felt guilty about the list and hid it everywhere, taking it out sometimes to add just one more reflection. He felt, as he had felt with the chemistry set, what would his answers be should anyone ask him why such matters between Kari and

himself were on his mind? But the insane effort to fill his mind with the stuff for the examinations left no corner for anything else; so this list became a germ of guilt in his mind yet the only safety valve he could think of to make room for the Examination Matters of the moment.

The first of Kari's three appointments—and he called on her—was with a director of a Finnish grain ship company and it was arranged that a windjammer (one of the last remaining: and the one that Mark had shown them all in that newspaper cutting a month ago) docking at Belfast in July would take Mark aboard as sailor—should he so wish—to Åbo in Finland, and then after re-loading and a month's respite, on its last voyage to Australia, before it would be broken up, the last of a famous line and the last of all such trading sailing ships.

This must surely thrill Mark. And it was a way of getting him to Finland. But it was not yet time to tell him about it.

As the Finn left Kari called him back, there was another point to it . . . but he did not hear her. She must write. (Or phone. She never wrote.)

The second appointment was at Epping Forest. All the way in a lovely front seat of a 38 bus. How she loved front top seats. She could *murder* anyone if anyone was seated there as she mounted the steps.

Did she see a long dark figure once again following her and entering the bus and going inside?

Up Shaftesbury Avenue, rounding Cambridge Circus, the bus set off: a pool of oil in the Circus.

Somebody had shot a rainbow under its heart and thrown it down there.

When the bus drew in at the Forest terminus, the long cream Daimler was already there. By it was standing a man all women fell for. Nearing sixty now and looking forty. Suave, self-assured, polished, so charming.

“Mlle., how very sweet of you to come.”

“Have you ever heard of Marie Stopes, Monsieur . . . what is your name?”

“Why, do you forget? Prince . . .”

“O yes, my Prince. Have you ever heard of Marie Stopes, Prince?”

“Why, of course, but . . . That is the strangest question I ever was asked. Marie Stopes? why of course.”

He was nettled by the question. They began walking into the forest.

At more than a hundred paces behind the dark figure definitely followed. It was as if Kari went around with an appendage.

“I curse the gods who made us so much different in our ages,” the Prince said helping her over a puddle.

“I suppose I might be your grand-daughter or even daughter?” she said.

“Ah, but then I couldn’t make the same fuss of you, could I?”

She stopped in her path: “Whv not?”

“It would be different wouldn’t it? No . . . loving, as it were?”

I wonder how many children this man has caused the birth of, she thought? The truth was, about ten times the number he had ever owned to. “That’s the woman’s look-out”: that was his argument.

He'd made a fool of himself over Kari. Sworn her the world for all eternity if she'd spend one week with him . . . What a *filthy* idea. He'd come round to 'life' when he couldn't get a 'week', and had begged her to marry him instantly.

And they sat. Ah! This took him back more than forty years, to a birch tree forest outside Viborg. A woman called Kari. A devil of a woman.

All in the gold of a silver afternoon, sitting on the ground by Connaught Waters, by nine tall beeches and in the middle of the beeches, one small hawthorn: drivelling love out by the ladle, one fornicating father and one dream daughter, strangely dull: strangely cold: strangely . . . revolted!

"O how I love you, how I love your green soft eyes . . ." and he went through her body spot by spot: and Kari thought, I don't care much about love but I wish this creature would stave off insulting the word.

"Will you, will you marry me?" O, he'd got back to that already.

She took her father's face—her father's face—in her two pudge hands, and said softly as a dove: "But you are married, my sweet."

"I'll divorce my wife tomorrow."

"Then divorce her my sweetest own: and your little fairy dove will give you her answer afterwards, because she must know," and she kissed him like down on his wet lips, "that you love your little pigeon only and no other nasty women."

"Can't you, can't you tell me now? O I am so crazy about you."

"Be crazy my dearest. More and more crazy. But your little dove wants to know you love only her and no other nasty, nasty women."

“But I promise you, my own, I promise, I promise.
But tell me, tell me!”

“I’ve told you.” And she kissed his lips just gently.

He pleaded for half an hour and she couldn’t stand it and coldly said: “If you ask me once more papa,” yes she called him papa just to see what it sounded like, “I’ll never marry you or speak to you again. But in a month or two from now you’ll get a little note from me: it will name a place somewhere in Scandinavia. If you are there at this certain place at a certain time, and if you can prove that you have started the divorce already, I will give you your answer then. Now, that’s enough.”

“Some place in Scandinavia? I’d go round the world for your answer. I’ll be there. Anywhere. Anywhere.”

“Then . . .”

“Then?”

“Then, we’ll see. If you are there, then . . .”

And the English climate saw them there love-making under nine peaceful beeches, and in the middle of nine peaceful beeches, one flowering hawthorn, so it turned on a little tradition and emptied buckets down on them from nowhere. They got up surprised, and while the heavens paused to refill their buckets they began to run up the slope to their car in which they later drove round for hours while it rained and rained. At least, the Prince ran; but Kari’s action has no name, but her most devoted admirer would be forced into admitting that it was ludicrous. She flitter fluttered straight forward circulating sideways, like sleep making efforts to wake up, or like, to tell the truth, a someone with the itch. In Jermyn Street they called it the Jermyn Street jounce.

The Prince put Kari down in Piccadilly by St. James' Church and staring up at the thirteen plane trees the Prince said of the one other:

“O look a catalpa, my dear.”

“A what?” asked Kari.

“A catalpa, my dear. Why an Indian bean-tree. Look, I haven’t seen one since we raised one on our estate near Viborg, in our hot-house.”

And he drove away.

14

A GHASTLY figure blocked her way.

“Please! Please! Please!” it implored in a terrible way.

It was Flash Rod.

God how delectable she was! He would go mad!

“Please! Please! Please!” he went on.

“Let me pass immediately!” she said sternly.

“Oh Mrs. Wilde! For the love of Heaven, give me one minute!”

“Let me pass. Instantly. Are you insane?”

“Yes, yes, I am, I am. What am I to do? What am I to do? I can’t get you out of my system, I can’t, I can’t. What am I to do? Tell me, tell me.”

“Get more and more ill. Really ill.”

“Don’t, don’t say things like that! Look Mrs. Wilde, look please. I tried to think what I could do. Look, I’ve spent all my time doing just a few drawings for you. Will you take them? Please, please.”

Kari would go insane herself if this boor didn’t get out of her way.

“No,” she said.

“Oh, but look, look: I tried so hard. See, see just this top one.” And he took the one out.

Her head was spinning. She liked to have her way:

and when people were told to get out of her path, they did so.

“This one?” she said and she was taking the drawing.

“Yes, yes this one. Look at it, look at it, will you? I think . . .”

She had taken it to the rusty spikes of some railings left in the grounds since the blitz. She crashed it through. And again. And again.

“Crucified as you will be!”

And he stood, bleeding inside.

And she waddled off.

15

THERE was a commotion in the corridor by Kari’s door. Quarrel’s cousin and little Tommie had arrived but the mother had been jammed in a closing lift and was in appalling pain and the blood from a blue wound terrified little Tommie. Kari arrived, told the small crowd not to worry, she knew precisely how to right things, and rushed the cousin in. She took the cousin, Janet, to her bedroom and gave Tommie some books in the living room, kissed him and told him he mustn’t worry.

Kari applied a lotion.

“But that’s a miracle, the pain’s stopped!” cried Janet, a blonde with a face which was either ugly or attractive, Kari couldn’t decide which, “Whatever is it?”

“O that’s nothing. Now the pain will come back in an hour so let’s look after it properly now, shall we?” said Kari.

Quarrel arrived, nearly fainted; blood always turned him: “Must get *your* blood then, mustn’t we?”

said Kari pinching him and sending him to the other room to Tommie.

“Ouch! Are you a bully or a tiger?” he asked.

“Just now, Geoffy, I’ve joined the Salvation Army.” And she returned to her patient.

She laid Janet out and started to dress the wound. Such efficiency was difficult to believe. The wound was cleaned as by a miracle. And at one point Kari had to remove a speck of iron. It was a long matter.

The door bell rang.

A doctor had arrived.

No one had asked for a doctor. Some busybody! . . .

But the doctor was there and had to come in.

“I was a nurse in the war,” Kari said hurriedly. If he knew what she had been using!

“That’s exceptionally expert, my dear young lady. I say, I do hope you’re still in our profession? No pain?” he asked the patient.

Kari put in: “I’m in the housewife profession I fear now doctor, but do you think there is any work, spare time, as it were? . . . I would like to continue.”

“Why yes my dear. Well, I think I can leave you in good hands. *Remarkable* hands if I might say so.”

“Hospital, doctor, or private? How might I get . . .” And Kari steered the conversation off the patient.

The doctor left without asking any names. Kari felt she must move from Jermyn Street tomorrow. These first impulses! Nothing more dangerous than first impulses. Still . . .

“Lay here quietly,” said Kari to Janet; “I’ll fetch Geoff. in case you want to talk or anything.”

So Kari and Geoff. changed rooms.

“And little Tommie,” asked Kari, happy with the little boy; “are you the most wonderful little boy in the world as they all say? Do you always suck your thumbs like that?”

“Sugar,” he said, smiling and winking saucily at her and holding out his finger.

“That’s not sugar, that’s brain,” said Kari. “See now,” and she sucked it; “now I’ll always have a little piece of your brain; won’t I?” she said and kissed him on his cheek.

“Yess!” he said.

“And you know what I will give you so that I can keep it?”

“Present?”

“Great big train,” she said, and showed him what she had bought him in the morning.

“Oooh! I am lucky,” he cried.

“Tommie,” she said.

“Yes Auntie Kari?” he cried by the train.

“Come here a minute.”

He came. She squatted to be level with him.

“You like to suck your thumb don’t you?”

“Yes. Daddy ses it’s naughty but Mummy ses it isn’t. It isn’t, is it?”

“Very, very naughty Tommie! A little iddly bit of your wonderful brain runs . . .” and she put her finger on his brain and traced it across his forehead down his head and neck and body and arm and finger; “and then,” and she put his thumb back in his mouth and pulled it out quickly crying “brain! There now you lost a little bit and you won’t be such a wonderful marvellous little boy like your wonderful mummy and daddy want if you do that often,” and she put his thumb back, pulled it out and softer cried “brain!” She held his eyes. The boy looked half terrified and half mesmerised. She kept her steady gaze upon him. “Now I’m going to show you a little game,” she went on in an even voice, “and you must do it, must do it, to get your brain back. Now you see these sweeties,” and she held some sugar sweets near him. She put his

thumb back; he seemed incapable of voluntary action. "Quickly: out! Say 'brain!' then, now I'm not going to look now Tommie, you must quickly take a sweetie when no one's looking and your brain will go back again, you will see." And touching him slightly on the head he did it all and she heard that a sweet had been taken. And she turned: "Now Tommie, everything's all right again. Look it runs up," and she traced her finger up and into his head again. "Back! isn't that wonderful? But it only counts, Tommie, If nobody sees you take it. Once more Tommie."

He did it once more. She heard his hand at the sweets. She turned sharply.

"Saw you!" she hissed.

"No no no no no I didn't, no I didn't!"

"You did! You did! You're naughty, naughty. It didn't get back did it?"

"No no no no no I didn't, I didn't. No no no."

The boy would have hysterics any minute, his eyes were stark alight, out of his head. He would go mad if she didn't let him . . . "Once more." And she let him succeed. And he was calm. But he almost swooned away.

"Play with your train now Tommie." And he went and played now with his train and seemed as it were to forget all that had happened.

"Well you are fantastic," Quarrel said coming in. "And, O no! you haven't given this to Tommie?"

"Look, look," cried the boy brightly, "Look what Auntie Kari gave me! Look, look."

"Did you say thank you, Tommie?"

"Yes I did, didn't I, Auntie Kari? I did say thank you, didn't I?"

"Of course you did Tommie. And you're the nicest little boy in the world and I'll give you plenty more."

"Will you really Auntie? Then I can play stations."

And he nearly ran to her arms, but not quite.

“You be a good boy and I’ll give you lots of things; and you can play stations,” she said and patted the boy on his head.

And Janet came in. “You *are* wonderful,” said Janet. “How lucky that you knew exactly what to do. I wouldn’t have, you know?”

And Quarrel’s chest nearly pushed Eros off his stand in Piccadilly: he was so proud he had found these delightful people and brought them all together.

16

MARK stared at his Hygiene and it sunk in slowly. He stared at his Materials and rammed them down. The Construction would hardly stay at all. “Destruction!” hissed the destructive little monkey of Jermyn Street. Mark pressed the Sanitation down into its dirt bin and the lid flew off. That was not meant for his memory and it would not stay. But it had to. For these few weeks. He jammed his hands on his temples and swallowed pages neat:

The piccolo tore like a tin on a string through his brain, babies howled, four televisions were piercingly heard, Valentine down the street might be the finest girl from here to Loomlock but her piano playing was plainly sadistic; everyone mowed lawns and Mark could take some grass out of his ears by now: his aunt had that very day bought a new radio and the atmospherics ruled the waves: only Drake hadn’t been getting off for the west so much lately.

Mark tried all the downstairs rooms including the outdoor shed. He tried his bedroom. He plugged cotton wool in his ears and rammed his fingers down. He wrapped the eiderdown round his head with two prick openings for his eyes. He went to the lavatory

and the smell drove him out. He tried the spare room and a window developed a rattle, while a man across the street deputising for Drake sung that he couldn't go home till the Lord came down. He wanted to scream that the Lord had been down, yet if he once lost his temper all would be finished: he could not come round easily after a thing like losing his temper. Didn't they know he was working for his examinations? Must the badminton club be overcrowded every night? Must its overflow of loving ones haunt the steps beneath his window, and whisper? Can't even kissing be done in silence?

It was not good weather but he clutched his books and went outside with Whisky. The birds sang, he had never heard them before; the wind played round and round, he had never noticed it previously: ants were crawling all over him, he had never earlier observed them: Kari was behind every bush whispering "Think of me" and he wanted to kiss her.

"Hallo Whisky. What sort of people are these? This Kari and Roland? They said they'd come down but they never did. They're nuts if they don't want to see you. Now Roland's gone to Scandinavia and he didn't see you first. Look at these ants, Whisky: violent autocracy: gave Hitler all his ideas: born to be workers: undernourished so that they can't be anything else. Look . . ."

Whisky sniffed at the ants and wagged his tail and came and licked Mark's face and went back and wagged his tail and sniffed at the ants. And looked like *the Authority on Autocracy*.

But then he wagged his tail too hard and knocked *Architectural History* into a puddle.

So Mark picked it out and managed to learn that the mania for obelisks began in 2500 and that the columns of the Palace of Xerxes would have collapsed

without a superstructure of timber. It also seemed that the Egyptians knew everything, that the ants were massing for a fight, that the elm leaves were rustling like silk in the breezes, that it must be wonderful to write poetry, that Kari was two people but wasn't the one she thought she was . . . and that the sections of a theodolite must be known by tomorrow.

It went on.

Mark had planned it all. He knew how much had to be piled inside and he would be ready in his nine subjects to the minute. He had swotted for two terms to the degree necessary but only these last weeks were the full torture. As it took these weeks to stoke it all finally in it would take the same number of weeks to sick it out afterwards: it was relative that way. Now Flash Rod had a photographic mind: he did no work before an examination but on that morning got up at 5.0 o'clock, swallowed a text-book neat, got it down and had forgotten it by nightfall. Tiny of course never learned anything. He just *was* an architect. It was in his veins. Taste, style, everything was in him. He was the only architect among them. He was a gift to the profession. He could be as great as Christopher Wren. He was always bottom in examinations. He could never somehow get it down and he never answered more than a few questions: concentrating on them to exhaustion. It never worried him. He *knew* he would pass his final exam: everyone knew what a great architect he would be. All the rest were just plodders and according to their plodding they would or would not pass.

But the result would make or break each one's career and life.

And Mark fought a memory that would not suck in, a world of noise he had never before noticed, a Whisky who wouldn't keep his mind off football, a

Kari, and a cry rising up, up, of tortured millions.

‘The de-frosting of pipes’: “We froze men white to 27 degrees then put a naked woman between them so that her heat could revive them.” ‘Bury a soil-pipe 3’ o” deep’: “We buried Norwegians 3’ o” deep and froze them in the snow: poured cold water over their naked bodies till they looked like a funny field of petrified chessmen.’ ‘Principles involved in building a factory’: “The factory for making soap from human fat was built by English prisoners . . . there are so many things you must think about. Think, think, think. *Someone* ought to think about them . . .”

Cram, cram, cram.

What was this blessed gift, education? What were these coveted trophies, degrees? What was it all? Where was the test, and of what? Certain questions came on certain text-books and if a student read all round his subject with zeal but escaped those possible questions from those isolated text-books he would fail. Would they ask Mark what he thought of architecture, whether he had any suggestions as to style? Would they tickle his imagination or mind one iota? No. Memory, memory, memory: of facts, dull facts; dates, kings, palaces, nine varieties of wood-rot, never eight, never ten: nine, and if you missed one out you lost marks and if you put one in you lost marks, there were only nine; so let no one argue. Definitions and formulæ. What is ‘duality’? What is ‘protostyle’? Define these. Why don’t they ask you if you think duality tommy-rot, isn’t the subject ‘Theory of Architecture’: shouldn’t you have your own ideas? And can you give your own definitions? No. Tiny would. He would worry it out for half an hour thinking it a little cheap to scribble down the book one. And he would fail because it wasn’t the book one. But Flash would pass, because it was the book one, not knowing the meaning

of the words.

And Mark crammed on.

They all did.

Except Flash Rod. No one knew where he was. No one saw him. Everyone took it for granted he was playing tennis.

Pills had broken off with Phoebe. That was the only shock in the department. Mark screamed "Is *that* what Kari told you to do?" "Of course not," said Pills.

Mark suspected everything ill came from Kari these days.

Yet twice a week he journeyed to London, kissed her all over, talked his head off with her and let her shoot it off to him that she was afraid her love for doing ill things grew. "Sometimes it's like being in a small boat in an ocean surrounded by salt water. Drink and I must drink more till I go crazy. Don't drink and I must go crazy by thirst."

17

PHOEBE was a sad soul these days. When anyone spoke to her she pushed her honey-gold hair in front of her face and burst into tears. Though a being be 75% water she wouldn't have much left if this went on. And she looked so much older. Phoebe with no cheery smile seemed more than thirty whereas she was less than twenty.

Mark had to have some activity so asked Pills to play him at tennis. Pills, bounce gone, turned up at the school courts and they played.

It was there that suddenly Mark saw the whole thing.

It took less than three seconds.

They were changing over between sets. Mark passed by the seat where their clothes rested. Under

the seat were their shoes. Something glinted up from inside a shoe. Something glossy . . .

It was a photograph of Phoebe. And in the other shoe, another. Pinned down. Pills trod his beloved into the dirt with every step he took!

Mark did not pause. He took a comb from his pocket, threw his mop of hair back, put back the comb, looked down once more . . . yes!

He went on to play.

The next time they changed over Pills as nonchalantly as possible placed one shoe upside down over the other.

At the end of the game Mark said:

“Pills I have rather an odd message for you from my sister-in-law.”

“I don’t want to hear it Mark.”

“I have promised to tell you.”

“Then tell me after the examination is over.”

Ignoring his friend, Mark turned away and with his back to him said distinctly: “My sister-in-law said you are to see her to-day at 5 o’clock. It’s important and a *must*. I can’t tell you any more than that, and I don’t want to talk about it: it doesn’t seem my business.”

Pills didn’t answer.

Then . . .

18

THEN Mark took an early train to London and went straight to Jermyn Street.

Glue-y with sleep Kari opened the door. Why must he always get her up so early? Most days resolved themselves into a terrible struggle to reach Fortnum and Mason’s across the road before they closed at 5 o’clock.

“Kari.”

"I'll come in a minute, Marky. Make some tea if you like."

She retired to her room.

But he went into her room.

"I have no time," he said. She was looking out of the window again. That wretched figure still by Princes Arcade. The same lank, morbid black form. It never left her now. If only it'd come out in the light a little more.

"I'll come in a minute," she said. First time he had come in like this.

"Sit down." My goodness, what's this, a lecture? She sat on the edge of the bed. Best place anyhow: she hadn't woken up yet. She yawned—treacle at the mouth—pulled her hair outwards like a mass of Brighton rock in the process of being made and waited for a theatrical speech from her pet student toy.

"I'm to speak about Pills."

"O Pills. How is he?" she yawned.

"Ill."

"Really? And what am I supposed to do about it?" If the curl that was cruel on her lip became the twist that was death in a mind . . .

"Release him."

"I don't keep him under lock and key."

"Your hemp is tougher stuff than locks and keys. I know nothing. Only that there was a game played in this apartment and since then all that was him has gone out of him and all that was Phoebe has left Phoebe. Yesterday she broke down in my arms. 'What is it, what is it?' she cried. 'If only I could know what it is. But he won't seem to speak. He avoids me. Why is our engagement broken off?'"

Kari played with her hair, and yawned, bored: "I never told him to break off any engagement; I never do anything so childish."

"Never do anything so childish," said Mark. "So she must never know the reason? *Nacht und Nebel*, eh? Your Bible? You twin Kari."

"Well! That's that then. Unless the great Mark Wilde intends to do something about it?"

"He does."

"O. And what? Or is that *Nacht und Nebel* too?"

"You are the only person, Kari, who ever came alive in my mind since I was born. I'm going away doodling around Greenland in a few weeks. I might have carried nothing but fondness in me for you. If it won't tickle your disgusting ego too much, I can say I was touching at being in love with you. Now I'll do that 8 a.m. morning newspaper game 'all clear or all scatter' matter for you and I will telephone you the result in the North as you have asked, because I am no blackmailer and will not pit my terms against yours: yes, that I will do, but . . . I have told Pills to come here to-day at 5 o'clock . . ."

"What for? I won't see him. I won't be in."

"You will be in, and you will see him. You will tell him to go back to Phoebe and cancel everything from his mind, whatever has got there, and not ever more to be a bloody fool, or . . ."

"So it is foolish to do something I asked? I will remember everything you say, Mark."

"Or . . ."

"Or what?!" she snapped.

"I'll never see or speak to you again as long as I live."

"An ultimatum? I don't like people who give me ultimatums, Mark! Be careful!"

"I don't give ultimatums, Kari. I do this on feeling: that's the way my feeling is: it's as simple as that. I'm coming back at six. If you haven't done this simple thing then you are out of my mind and body for all time. Goodbye."

And he had gone.
Something caught in Kari.
Never in all her life . . .

This whipper-snapper boor student's coldness had done something inside her that even the guns of her 'friends' had not done.

PILLS came at 5 o'clock. Stood stupidly and creepily many yards away from her. Repulsive, white bile expression. Ugh!

"Pills," she said; "go back to Phoebe and forget our game of a little while back."

"Yes . . . yes, Mrs. Wilde. I will Mrs. Wilde."

Brrrr! Makes me shiver to hear worms like that. And this was the one that all the song was about? Mm'mmm. Supposed to be full of bounce? I'll put him back through his paces after Mark has gone away, if I can bear looking at him.

"You had better go now," she said.

"Yes . . . yes, Mrs. Wilde. I would like to say . . ."

"I don't want to hear anything. Now go."

She'll take it out of Mark for this!

"May I just once, just once . . ."

"Don't touch me!" she said as he came forward. What was he going to do? If he touched her she wouldn't be clean for ten years. But he had not meant to touch her. Hate! How she hated! White hate! Red hate! Green hate! Black hate! Yellow hate! She had never felt . . .

"Go back to Phoebe," she said. "Get on with your architecture and don't be foolish any more. Go now and do as I tell you."

Imbecile. Microbe. Hate, hate, hate, there is nothing like it. How she hated Pills! Get out, else . . .

“Thank you . . .”

Thanks! Oh this is too much. He's crawlly and obsequious as one she remembered . . . Thanks! that's very good. Quite right too, he should say thanks. He's got four whole weeks' leave to be a man again. And then . . .

He went.

Funny about her cheeks like that, like ivory curved balls. Funny about her eye-brows, like tiny mangos. Funny how her face was a mass of beautifully arrayed and subtly shaped domes. If they hadn't fitted in one with the other there's no knowing how gross it would have looked. Funny about her flesh like that. This oozing of fatty pus: mucous: if it hadn't been sensual that could have been gross too. Funny about her torso. Her legs being so much longer than normal: now the other way and she would have looked like a frightful little Arab. Funny about her hands: little balls of unction and ooze, then, very thin in contrast, long spindle fingers, with arched nails, fiercer, sharper and more stiletto than a tiger's. Or than a vulture's. Funny how so much straightness came out of so much roundness . . . they'd dig into flesh . . . Funny about her always coming out on top. Funny how some people always seem on top as if it is theirs by right and others always seem underneath. Funny about her breasts, they were so startlingly young: yet some of her, her mind for instance, was old. She had never sought life: but no one had lived more. She was so lazy; she'd make a beautiful cat on a silk bed. Yet with no effort every aspect of life had been known to her in the space of the last dozen years. Funny, she didn't care for Roland at all, yet he had become quite a sort of homey something around: she had felt that before he left. Well, that's one there in Finland out of her three musketeers . . .

She sat by the keys of the piano. Now she would miss hearing Mark play, she would miss that. He had strummed it often. And Quarrel too. Didn't like the way Quarrel strummed it though. Although, she always thought, I'll cut Mark's hands off, I'll smash those fingers, because that's about the *only* way she has of thinking, yet, she really would be missing him *if* he went . . . But then he wouldn't of course. Something rather nice about what he ~~wanted~~ to do. Greenland? O no, Finland, Marky. When shall I tell you? You said you would prefer a windjammer and a whole grand windjammer I have got you.

Funny, her body. She wished she could have clasped it herself. It was a miracle.

She would like to sit down for weeks and weeks and think of all the bad things she would like to do.

Funny how she couldn't think of anything else. Just destruction. And then power. And then nowt.

She tinkled the keys. 'There now, hell's music,' she said. 'I would like to learn to play, but it takes so long. I could certainly annoy people while learning, that would be fun. Open the windows and annoy the whole of Piccadilly. Heeeee! I must learn the violin. That would be dicky.'

She stood up and looked out of the window. The 13 plane trees and . . . the catalpa. They had caught two burglars in these gardens down there three nights ago. Whistles, twenty police, two wretched hunted men, dogs: just like a private cinema show, watching from up there at 2 a.m. She had wished the men had got away. There was that shadow in the Arcade again! Did he *ever* go away? Yes, the burglars: the only law and order she had liked was Hitler's. Where you could get a real intoxication out of it. She was on the side of the burglars here. Red buses still going down. Broken church that. Which airman had hit it? 'I

would have hit all the churches first. Funny thing religion isn't it? Why shouldn't Flash make a god out of me? I'm flesh, I'm living, I'm something actual. Not just a myth like these other monster fables. Why not die for me? Thousands died for queens before who weren't a tenth as handsome as I. I'd die for me if I were a man. I wish I could marry myself. Delirious company. Spend all my life trying to trick myself. And who'd torture ~~who~~? We'd lie together. What fun. Wrap my arms around myself. I'd go to bed with a mirror. And I'd be colder than the mirror. Look at that instep, look at that leg, built to drive men mad: look at these hips, bell hips: Kari, you are so wonderful, but you can't play the piano like big lout Marky. I hope Marky can keep out of my poison. I can't help myself, I must lay it, that's me: but I hope he wins, and I think he might just, might, will. Only I'll have to punish him for this afternoon.'

And she sat down and tried to play the piano. Then stared again at Piccadilly. Prostitutes not out yet. She could tell prostitutes a thing or two that would help them. Why don't they dress to catch? Tiny had said they had been far superior before the war. How did *he* know? At what age does the son of a bishop start? They were letting down the oldest profession now. White light from somewhere all over the cheek of the Piccadilly Hotel. Funny this chap who goes down at 2 o'clock every afternoon and 2 o'clock at night crying newspapers. Can put your clocks right by him. And at night too. Funny. Saw him once. Quite a surprise actually to see him. Can see the backside of Regent Street running up. Austin Reed's. Can hear Big Ben back in Westminster striking six . . . I thought Mark said he would be here at 6 o'clock. And the toots from the ships on the river: funny how you can hear so much here sometimes. Big Ben like an alarm clock.

Goes to bed early, Piccadilly. Where's the fun in London? Dull. She liked London. But not after midnight and a morgue on Sundays. Suppose they all go home early to beat each other up. Everybody goes before eleven. Extraordinary feeling in St. James' on Sundays.

Her father said he wouldn't stay here long as he didn't like the climate. Her father would stay where she decided! Something right about her father: dashing: lover: but dull. O so empty when you once looked into him. Brilliant, for the flashing of the seconds. There was nothing but life in his veins: but no meat, no meat, no value, no truth. She'd have to get *him* up in Finland soon now too. Dear old Popski. Loveski with himski? No thankski!

Funny, though, Popski. Already divorcing his wife. Quite right. But funny. 'Funny, fancy all us meeting up there again in Hamina. And we did it all before only time rolled on and only I kept us all together. Funny me. Shall I take Mr. Bean Tree with me? Funny bad me doing a good thing like that bringing of us altogether. Bet I get some bad into it. Can't help it. It won't keep out. Funny.'

Funny. Everything was funny. Funny little Kari. Twenty odd years gone by. Funny. The pictures of the camps were always before her eyes. Delirious days. 'I bet Satan didn't leave his seat once but had his meals brought to him. About Satan, they say his last trick of all is to let his own disciples down. Nasty . . .

'Tee-hec-hec. Anyone wanting a little suffering? Bring him in. Obedience and all that tosh: bring him in, bring them all in. Shall I go on Piccadilly at night and rope in one or two? How much do I get? Must get my fair price. Must ask Tiny the latest prices. Nothing slow or backward about that boor. He gets on with things. He knows the prices. Mustn't undercut. Little

extra perhaps because I'm a little special. Come up. Mark's late, isn't he? Anybody heard of any decent tortures lately? There was something we did in the camps . . . but it couldn't be printed. Funny the latest law: frustrate nothing, excess, excess: 'they shall be told nothing is wrong,' saith the Devil. Complete surrender and on with the urges. He's made a right about there since dear old Purity. Funny. Please Mr. Satan make me a swine. Please Mr. Satan come and have a cup of tea will you every Wednesday and Saturday because Mark's going away and you're the only company I've got left . . .

'Would anybody like to be held down in a vat of pus . . . Bring him up: bring him up!

She flashed round!

Mark stood there!

20

"MARK, I'm a swine, I'm a devil. I love it! I'll kill you if you say I don't: I have to, have to tell you. I *love* killing . . ."

"Kari; did you? . . ."

"Yes I did! And I'm not going to forgive you in a hundred years. So look out."

"I'm glad you did it, Kari."

"I said I *love* killing!" she shouted. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"Tschiffely says there are butchers in a South American city who go down to the beach every Sunday where penguins mass in thousands and have competitions to see who can slaughter the most . . . not satisfied with their slaughter of the week."

"I like to dive my hand through men's intestines."

"Butchers do it with the sweetest little animals who only yesterday were running round."

“I like to see a man struggle when caught.”

“Millions of fishermen all over the world get a thrill from putting a live fly on a pin, or a worm on a hook.”

“I like to see the writhing of a man being burnt alive.”

“Thousands used to watch a burning at the stake or the wriggle of a man hanging.”

“I am ill Mark! I tell you! I MUST BE FED!!”

She came towards him: spoke like rapid gunfire:

“Why do you try and pretend I am not what I am? I am what I am. I like it. Leave me, leave forever. Leave me before I catch you and put a skewer through your heart and turn it and turn it! Leave me, get out, get out, get out; get out while you can: I am mad I tell you, mad, mad, mad! and I'll swim in blood before I die! I love it, love it, love it. O I have an aching in my belly, I want to twist you, you understand?”

“Try.”

“I will.”

And she grabbed his arm. And he threw her to the couch. “For every twist you get one back” And he bent her arm and twisted it.

“I hate you. Get out!” she screamed.

“Do you want to twist any more?”

“Fool, Mark: fool! You think all I have in my power is the turning of your wrist? I can drag a man down, till he want it, asks for it!”

“By the oldest trick in the world. By making a man lust for you then refusing him.”

“Well? . . .” she sneered.

“I have an oddity. I only lust where I am wanted. When I am rebuked my lust turns its own tap off.”

“I want you.”

“Unfortunately, Kari, I don't want you. I have another oddity which I am told is a woman's not a man's quality: I only lust where I can love. I know no

one in the world means more to me than you: but love is still scratching away at a surface between us."

"I can make you love me. You will see."

He kissed her.

"Try," he said.

She threw him off and went away. He did not follow. Frustration meant nothing to this fellow! Not a human human!

"You're always trying to pretend I'm not what I am," she said darkly.

"It may be so," he said from the couch.

"A cat catches a mouse, knocks it down every time it tries to get away: then when it's too weak to move any more, leaves it, disinterested. And that's me. Would you tell a cat it's not a cat? Then why tell me I'm not I?"

"It's an attraction a cat has for movement. You have a mind: if you did something . . . even sucking your thumb for instance? if you knew it was not right, you could stop it."

"There is no right: shut up with your sermons!"

"Would you like to be a mouse and meet a cat?"

"I never will be caught," she said. "Unless by you. Are you trying that sort of thing on me?"

"*Nacht und Nebel.* Night and Fog. I shouldn't tell you, Kari, *my* secrets. And if I was going to play cat and mouse with you, I wouldn't. But I will tell you: I can only be straight. Dull maybe: but I will play no game with anyone's or even my own affections. As I am to you you have the grand advantage of knowing, since you play games, that that is as I honestly feel towards you."

She came and sat on the divan.

"Kiss me," she said.

He did.

"Your kisses are too strong. Awful. Look," she said

and showed him how. Then they went into an embrace and the world turned a full circle, and the dark man outside by the Arcade had snow to his knees, and everyone over sixty was dead before they had finished.

Afterwards she said to him: "You know enough to have me hung a hundred times."

He said: "I think that what love has already risen in me for you is from the trust you have placed in me. It makes me the proudest being alive."

"Never let me down, Mark, will you?"

"When you are ninety, you will see, you will be able to say 'Mark Johnstone Wilde never let me down'."

"Ninety? I *would* try and live, for you."

"Let me help you escape all your pursuers."

"*You* mustn't get caught, Mark. They can get anything out of people now. It's easy. I'd be lost the moment they ever did catch you. I am terrified that you know so much, really I am."

"I'll keep faith with you or die!" he said strongly.

"I believe in you, Mark, remember that. I believe in you absolutely. And you have my life in your hands. I never ever before told anyone . . . anything. Roland . . . he knows nothing. Nothing much. Nothing that would make any difference."

"I hope I fall in love with you," Mark said.

"I do too," she said.

"I think I'm taking the beginning of the fall."

"I never want to hurt you, Mark: but I cannot trust myself. Watch out . . . dear one," she said. Never in all her life such a genuine endearment from her lips! "You watch out: and I'll try, Mark," she continued. "But never goody-goody. Never ask me to be goody-goody. Take E-V-I-L out of D-E-V-I-L and there is not much left is there? Just D for dunce. I'll have to make mush of *some* people, *some* time: but I will really

try: and you are the only one in the world I will ever try for. I never expected I would . . . fight . . . my delirium: but I will, because I want you: I'll try, try, try: if only I can keep away from all these people now . . . I know they'll give up the chase if I can make them think I'm in the Argentine or Spain or somewhere: Mark . . ." and she turned his face to hers lip against lip.

"Yes?"

And as they kissed she said:

"This is the one and only true kiss of my life. We will kiss to my really trying to be more as you would have me and to your keeping loyalty to me. You must never get arrested."

21

MARK was arrested.

It was out by Steerin.

It was the day Mark was to leave for London to meet the Newspaper Players in the morning.

Luckily he had not Whisky with him. He was always glad that he never took Whisky with him that day.

He was nearly mad from crushing down bricks, stanchions, beams, caryatids and Parthenons into a memory that chucked them straight out again. A whisper now drove him to a frenzy and all nature and humanity that didn't scream, whispered in that last month. All of him was nervous, taut. Kari, he thought, had meant well: but she had got into his pages and the cries of the camps rang round him, whips cracked, and Kari leered and sneered.

It was a student with a mind like a volcanic car-

buncle that went that day, three days before his examinations commenced, along the crest of the cliffs from where he lived, past the disused cricket pitch, by the elms and blackthorn bushes, down the slopes to the level crossing, past the foot of Loomlock Castle, over the railway, along the reclaimed Dutch-built land, to the stepping-stones that at low tide crossed the estuary to Steerin, up the yellow road to the village, past the broken wall stretching like fingers out to sea, past the thatched roofed Dutch built houses, past the churchyard where Pacific Harst and Ocean Sterckenburgh lay buried, to the blitzed and broken cottage . . .

Why had he left it so late? He would only just have the time to visit the blitzed house, to check up on the rules of the Newspaper Game, then to scramble back home, eat some scraps and catch the last night train to London. To miss the Newspaper Game might cost the life of one he must never let down, whatever else he did. Nothing must go wrong to hold him up else how could he then reach London? . . . It had been the studying: till the last second. To have arrived at the house only at dusk was another senseless thing to have done: wonder of wonders that he had a match on him and he lit it to read the writing: I.P.O.K.: U.A.N.O.K. and all he could think of as he rubbed it out was capok. For a moment also he took out the paper that was in his pocket to look at it: that paper that was the accumulated list of questions he was later to ask Kari about "Why he thought she wished to do things," mostly Freudian, mostly sexual, though many questions were directly about the camps and Germany, and he had thought at home, here he was on a Kari-bound mission to the blitzed house anyhow, he'd take the paper along with him and think about the questions as he walked, which he never, never should have done

and never, never would have done had he not been in a tensed un-sound state owing to the forced digestion of twenty musty books he would thrill at committing to the flames in a few more weeks. But if the questions slipped out of his pocket or came into another's hands he could never explain away anything about them.

He was leaving, just placing the paper back in his pocket . . .

“Excuse me lad.”

A police car had drawn across his path and blocked his way. Four men were in it. One approached him.

“Yes?” said Mark.

“Where have you been lad?”

“In the last minutes you mean?”

This paper burned up his pocket. Mark continuously had the feeling that he hadn't put it in quite securely, but was terrified to put his hand there: and equally terrified that it might fall to the ground any minute.

“In the last hour.”

“Been walking about Steerin,” said Mark.

“Where are you from?”

“Clucktown.”

“That's quite a way lad.”

“Five miles.”

“What did you come here for?”

“To Steerin?”

“Yes lad.”

“I often come here.”

“I know, you've been seen here.”

“Well.”

“Where have you been just now lad?”

“To the village.”

“Stop anywhere in the village?”

“In the graveyard,” half smiled Mark.

“Anywhere else?”

“In this blitzed building here, if that’s what you mean.”

“That’s what I mean lad. Will you come along with us?”

“Yes.” And Mark went.

Bloody paper in his bloody pocket: scared to put his hand to it: scared it might fall.

He was shown to the car.

“I think we must warn you, that anything you say may be used in evidence.”

“I see,” said Mark, and got in. The two front seat policemen waited in the car and the two others waited in the road.

One man said: “Been much in Germany son?”

“Me? I’ve never been in Germany,” said Mark.

“I was in Austria just a little while ago.”

“Were you? What were you doing in Austria?”

“Hitch-hiking. I was in Italy and France as well.”

“Do much hitch-hiking?”

“No,” said Mark. “I’m not very brave at asking for lifts.”

The other man asked:

“What’s your name?”

“Mark Wilde. Mark Johnstone Wilde.”

“Have you got any papers on you?”

“An Identity Card.” Christ! that paper! Next to his Identity Card. Burning holes at one a minute in his jacket!

“Can we see it?”

Mark got it out: successfully: carefully.

“Married, Mr. Wilde?”

“No,” Mark offered a smile.

“Girl friends?”

"I would like to think so," said Mark; "but whether they would be so happy for me to claim them I don't know."

"Why not?"

"I'm no braver with girls than I am at asking for lifts," said Mark.

Another car drew up. Some words were exchanged.

"You are to go with the other car."

Mark went.

It drove off.

"Got many German friends?"

"No."

"We've been looking for you for quite a time Mr. Wilde."

Mark did not answer.

"Do you write much on walls Mr. Wilde?"

"No."

"Do you always go around afterwards rubbing it out?"

They had seen that? Then they had seen him reading that paper. Then he'd get searched he supposed. He could never explain anything on that paper. What a fool he had been to carry that around. And the questions about the Germans . . .

"No."

"This is the police station. Will you come with us please?"

Inside was a large room. A sort of hall.

"Sit down, will you please?"

And he sat down at a table opposite the sergeant on duty.

"Your name and papers please."

He gave his name and his Identity Card again.

"Will you wait anywhere in the hall please."

Mark went to the further end of the hall and sat.

Now supposing he missed that last train to London?

It looked as if he'd be certain to. How the hell would he get to London by 8 o'clock in the morning?

"Take a chair anywhere."

Mark went down the hall.

'This paper with the questions about Kari!!!

"Can I go to the lavatory?" he asked the sergeant, going up to him again.

"Why yes certainly. It's at the end on the left."

Mark supposed there'd be mirrors there. Every move he made would be watched. He was surprised even they let him go there. He had no more matches. Thank heaven. It would have been insane to have set it alight, yet it was a temptation. To tear it up and pull the chain? It would disappear so easily. He knew it was best to leave it exactly where it was and make no move. Even so he took it from his inside pocket and put it in his back trouser pocket. That seemed the least obvious place. They might take his jacket from him and still leave his trousers with him.

He went back.

A young policeman, this sergeant.

"Thank you," he said. "I suppose you've no idea how long I'll be?"

"How long you'll be? How do you mean?"

"How long before I shall be allowed to go?"

"Sometimes it takes two days. Sometimes more. It depends."

"I see. I meant about tonight. I have a train to catch back to Clucktown. The last one goes to Clucktown about 9 o'clock you know?"

"I can't say about that."

"When will I know?"

"It might be a couple of hours, I can't say, before they see you."

"I hope no one will worry about me. Do you think I could telephone my aunt or someone? She might be

going out soon I think.” “

“I will ask when another officer comes.”

“I could speak to her about arranging bail, couldn’t I? What happens in cases like this?”

“Sometimes they just keep you till the trial.”

“And don’t allow bail even?”

“It depends on what they decide.”

“I shouldn’t have thought it was much of a crime to enter blitzed houses?” said Mark.

“That depends,” said the sergeant.

“Even to write on the walls: I should have thought hundreds had done it. Don’t you think it seems a small thing?”

“I couldn’t say, I’m sure. Do you work near here?”

“Work? No, I go to school in Clucktown.”

“I have a young brother at a school at Clucktown.”

“Really? I go to the Arts School: to the School of Architecture.”

“He’s in the lower Arts School. Roberts, John Roberts.”

“I know John Roberts: he’s an outside-left,” said Mark.

The sergeant, hatless, sat on one edge of the table. “What did you say your name was?”

“Mark Wilde.”

“I think he has mentioned you. Aren’t you the first team captain?”

“And centre-half,” said Mark.

“Yes, he has mentioned you.”

“He’s a mighty good player,” said Mark. “He’ll be in the first team without any doubt next year.”

“Clever with the pencil too, is John,” said the sergeant.

“Got our exams on Monday,” said Mark. “Will this all be over by Monday?”

“I doubt whether it will reach the Court by Monday. Sometimes they deal with it immediately of course.”

“How do I get out? I mean I have to study up till the last minute. Can my aunt bring bail or something?”

“They might allow it, sometimes they do. Hang on; I’ll tell them about the last train to Clucktown.”

“Thanks.”

The sergeant went to the inner door. He could be seen through the lobby. Another sergeant came back with him. They were talking.

The young sergeant said: “They have to fetch the Criminal Police you see. This is not a job for us. We don’t have any Criminal Police here. We have to send to the mainland. It depends, if they’re not out on a job, they might come soon: if not, it’s difficult to say. It’ll be tonight, but how late I don’t know.”

The other man came forward:

“Sit down will you please?”

Mark sat.

“Now just give me a few particulars. Your name, address, we’ve got. What does your father do?”

“I am an orphan.”

“Are you? I’ll put it down. Who do you live with then? Have you brought yourself up?”

“An aunt. She’s at the same address of course.”

There was another officer at the lobby door.

The Criminal Investigating Officers had arrived.

“Quick,” said the young sergeant nodding, and seemed pleased.

“Wait a minute here,” said the man at the desk rising, and Mark was again left.

“Come upstairs, will you please?”

Mark followed. Met a man in civilian clothes. Followed him.

Into a small room. Two desks. An office. There was

another man, also civilian. The second man stood by the fireplace and did not talk. Mark sat opposite the first at a desk.

“Mr. Mark Wilde?”

“Yes.”

“Occupation?”

“Student.”

“Where?”

“In Clucktown.”

“Will you tell us why you came to Steerin to-day?”

“I often come. Usually with my dog.”

“Yes, you have been seen here before. Why do you come here Mr. Wilde?”

“I like coming. I’ve been to Steerin since I was six. I always liked the place.”

“Had you any special reason to come to-day?”

“No, no special reason.”

“Yet you came?”

“Yes.”

“You entered a blitzed house, where . . .” he looked up some papers; “you were also seen entering on May 12th?”

“Did I? I have no idea of the date.”

“Did you come about that time?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“No reason.”

“But you came and you entered the same blitzed house?”

“Yes.”

“You remember that?”

“Yes.”

“You wrote on a wall?”

“Yes.”

“And to-day you rubbed something out from a wall?”

“Yes.”

Golly! that paper in his pocket!

“Why?”

“Because I had written there. It was blitzed and all that: but there seemed no point: I rubbed it out to-day.”

“What did you rub out?”

“Some letters.”

“What letters?”

“A sort of a way of remembering something.”

“Remembering something?”

“Yes.”

“What?”

“The first letters of some architectural words.”

The man by the chimney piece turned his back and ran his hand backwards and forwards along the shelf.

“*Sprechen sie deutsch?*” he suddenly turned and asked. (“Do you speak German?”)

“*Nur ein wenig,*” said Mark. (“Only a little.”)

“*Kennen sie viele Deutsche?*” he asked. (“Do you know many German people?”)

“*Nein,*” said Mark. (“No.”)

“*Warum sind sie zu den Deutschen so freundlich?*” (“Why are you so friendly with the German people?”)

“Excuse me,” said Mark; “perhaps I’m showing off to be trying to speak German at all. I have just been in Austria and learned a little. If you were asking me why I am so friendly with the German people; I am not: I am not friendly with the German people.”

The other man took up the questioning.

“This . . . did you say . . . architectural letters or something?”

“Yes.”

“Why all this, Mr. Wilde?”

“I am nearly crazy in my studies for my architectural examinations that I begin on Monday. I use

a thousand, no doubt silly, little tricks to remind me of certain things."

"And these?"

"Were some letters to help me remember some phrases."

"Then why did you rub them out?"

"I remembered I had put them there. I came past to-day. I went in to refresh my mind. I rubbed them out because although it was a blitzed building I never mark any buildings."

"And so you came specially all this way to-day just to rub some letters off a blitzed building wall?"

"No," said Mark.

"No?"

"No. I did not come specially. I was passing and remembered and went in."

"You did not come specially?"

"No."

"You are quite sure of that Mr. Wilde?"

"Quite sure."

"And you could see all right to rub these letters out?"

"No."

"You couldn't?"

"No."

"Then what did you do?"

"I struck a match."

"Can we see your match-box?"

"I threw it away. It was my last match."

"You agree, do you, that you struck a match?"

"Yes."

The two went into a whispering conference and left the room, with the remark "Wait here a few minutes."

After some minutes another man was shown in.

After a deal of silence, Mark said: "Will you have a seat?"

“*Nein, nein.*” (“No, no.”)

“*Sind sie Deutscher?*” (“Are you German?”)

“*Ja.*” (“Yes.”)

“*Ich bedaure dass ich nicht besser deutsch spreche. Ich war in Österreich.*” (“I am sorry I do not speak German much. I was in Austria.”)

“*Waren sie dort?*” (“Were you?”)

The German didn’t seem to want to talk.

Soon he was called out.

The first two officers returned.

“Now Mr. Wilde, we would like to have more details: why were you in the blitzed house so long and what were you doing?”

“I’m afraid that’s all mixed up with my examinations,” said Mark. “You see I take my examinations on Monday, I think I told you. My weakest subject is construction. One master of ours—the design master actually, a Mr. Raebolt—advised me to look in blitzed houses: there you can see constructions laid naked, laid bare as it were: also, often ‘sections’ in stark reality: and I understand ‘elevations’—and ‘plans’ with difficulty—but ‘sections’ I can hardly grasp at all. The ‘idea’ of a ‘section’ if you understand me, defeats me.”

“Very nice explanation Mr. Wilde. You were seen with your hand doing up your trousers.”

“O mercy on us, did someone see that? I am very sorry. I went—I relieved myself, is that the expression? —in some bushes before the village. As I lit the match in the building, I remember I saw my buttons not properly fastened. I fastened them. I am sorry if anyone saw. I am usually very careful about these things.”

“So you say you went to some bushes?”

“Gentlemen,” said Mark; “you must excuse me: I am answering all your questions to the best of my

ability: excuse me asking, haven't I the right to ask what am I being charged for?"

"You don't know?"

"No."

"You can't tell *us* what you are being charged for?"

"No."

"Immoral conduct and contact with Germans."

"Good gracious."

"How would you understand that, Mr. Wilde?"

"Well: immoral conduct, if you call it that, I would understand. But that's impossible. That was at the bushes and I am always very careful."

"That's your story is it?"

"Yes."

"And the writings on the wall?"

"No," said Mark. "Writing. One. Not writings."

"You only wrote once on the wall?"

"Yes."

"And all the others?"

"I don't understand. Neither then nor now did I see any others. I have told you what I think might be the only construction I can put on your accusation of Immoral Conduct in this case: will you please tell me, what you mean by the words?"

"You were seen entering the blitzed building next to the church on May 12th remaining at least forty minutes and writing on the wall. To-day you were seen entering there: and later seen rubbing off the wall and attending to your trousers. You are being charged Mr. Wilde with indecent conduct with Herr Otto Schmidt of the German prisoner-of-war-camp at Steerin: with indecent writings on the wall: and it is suspected writing the names of others that Herr Schmidt might contact. It is suspected that you gather lists and write the names up on the wall."

"Let me tell you," said Mark. "I know nothing

about homosexuality: medically. I know not whether there are causes, physical or biological reasons: I myself feel very sorry for all people made other than in the normal way: but I can tell you I will run a hundred, no a thousand, no, ten thousand miles away from any single one that ever approached me. I have an overflowing horror of it; I am so violently opposed by instinct that there is no describing!"

The man came from the chimney piece.

"There's been a great amount of it here and half the island is up in arms against it. We know this Herr Schmidt has organised a great mass of it."

"But surely he wasn't in the house while I was?"

"He was."

"Then why didn't I see him? And who saw? I saw no one. No one at all."

"There have been so many complaints that the house opposite keeps a constant watch."

It had been the man from the chimney who seemed to have lifted the screen as it were, cleared the air, and either had accepted completely Mark's innocence, or, by taking him into all this confidence was trying to trick him.

The other man leaned forward:

"You say you only wrote once on the wall?"

"That's all."

"Can we see an example of your handwriting?"

Mark wrote: "Cheers for Whisky."

The inspector looked at it.

"Whisky's my dog," Mark leaned forward.

The inspector was comparing. "No, no, nothing," he looked up at the chimney piece ornament.

The chimney piece ornament spoke already to Mark completely as man to man . . . had he *really* brushed the charge aside? It seemed so . . . "It's the village," he said; "you understand when something

like this comes to a small island village like this, everyone seems to look for nothing else: everyone suspects everyone. We think a German under a British name is the main link. There have been four cases in the last month, did you know?"

"No, I didn't," said Mark.,

"Schmidt's only a *nom-de-plume*. We think he organises from the German side and gets a percentage."

"It's done by payment?"

"We think so. We know it's organised."

"I'm afraid a thousand pounds wouldn't tempt me," said Mark.

The two went into a whispering conference.

The man sat down at the table again.

"Mr. Wilde, you're free now. This will all be torn up and you'll hear no more about it."

"Thank you," said Mark quietly.

"That's all."

Mark rose to go.

"Thank you. Good-bye, gentlemen," he said quietly.

"Good-bye," they said.

Mark was leaving. As he put his hand to the handle the man still at the table, said:

"Mr. Wilde."

"Yes?"

Mark turned and faced them.

"Is this 'Cheers for Whisky' the words you wrote on the wall?" asked he who had been sitting at the table.

"No," said Mark.

"What did you write?"

"Only some letters," said Mark.

"What letters?"

And the man pushed forward a piece of paper,

Mark wrote:

“I.P.O.K.: U.A.N.O.K.” and again the only word that beat through his mind was the ridiculous one of capok. How to explain . . .?

There was a pause.

“What do you think John?” the table man asked the chimney piece ornament.

“Certainly: why yes, certainly,” said the second.

“Well Mr. Wilde . . .”

Mark waited.

“We’ve taken up a great deal of your time,” the table man said; “you can ask for a car to take you home or to the station or anywhere.”

“That’s very kind,” said Mark.

“Not at all.”

“Shall I go?” asked Mark.

The table man picked up the receiver of the telephone.

Mark waited.

“I’m sorry,” said the table man, “all the cars are out. You could wait or go as you wish. Ask downstairs if you want a car, they will tell you.”

“Thank you.”

“Not at all.”

Mark left.

22

MARK went downstairs. He wandered out in the street. No one stopped him! He went back. He asked for a car. They would be very pleased to help him but there could be no promises when one would arrive in.

He wandered out again.

He went to the yellow road to the mainland but it was already dark.

He took twenty slow paces into the night, then . . . he ran like an Olympic sprinter. The moon darted its

head out of a sheath of white bedclothes and stared at him.

Ran like the wind down the yellow road.

Bats flitted, owls hooted, pee-wits cried.

Ran like the wind down the yellow road.

The air was empty, bleak the landscape, crisp the breeze from the sea.

Ran like the wind down the yellow road.

Past the round cottages: alone, untenantcd: a shattered barn, a burnt-out stable.

The sea air came over the sea-wall, sped salty over the fields, crossed the grey haystacks, drove dry through the hedges.

Ran like the wind down the yellow road.

He reached the house-boats.

He reached the ferry-station.

But the ferry had made its final journey and was on the other side!

He ran to the water. He took off his socks and shoes and trousers . . . O no, not his pants: anything seemed to be a sexual offence in Steerin . . . and into the water, clothes above his head.

Got to swim: here goes. Anything for the ladies!

Golly, it was cold.

Mighty wide piece of river. Suffering catfish what a current!

He struck out strongly.

He made it.

No cheers?

What, no film cameras?

Would the mainland police mind if he ran home naked as there wasn't anything left dry to put on?

But he dressed: wet clothes—ouch, damn dank and soggy: and he dashed off down the pot-holed sea-walls . . .

The moon played gooseflesh on the water: a glow-

worm put on its rear light as Mark plodded by: bats and goatsuckers carved their silent courses over this forgotten world. Clinging wet and becoming miserable Mark thrust on as silently as the bats and the nightjars. On the horizon to the south was the River: the gentle lights of a lovely liner; and some breezes out at sea seemed talking to themselves.

But Mark pushed forward incredibly slowly because he was scared of the pot-holes and he had a task he could only fulfil if he was whole. For he must cycle now to London.

Mercy, how the moonlight drains the wild rose of its blood.

Across the River a storm was stirring: so far away Mark fancied it was the echo of the cannon waggons assembling to fight against Napoloen again. And the wind nattered away like old ladies over there: and, all comfy, the homely liner passed by and out to sea.

A light like the dying flicker of a candle, but lightning beyond the River, laid a lick of a whip across a hill, and an o so distant zoom of thunder and Mark knew for certain that the first cannon had been fired again at Waterloo.

23

AUNT MABEL snored.

Whisky seemed to climb rigging all round the room so high he jumped to welcome Mark. But silently: Whisky always knew when to climb rigging silently.

Mark changed his clothes.

He went to the shed and fetched his cycle out. A battered and bruised warrior. Two threadbare tyres, a dynamo that functioned only• intermittently, a carrier with a broken upright, nine spokes missing in the rear wheel and the wheel buckled like a Scotsman's

knee on Saturday night, a chain that cried for oil and could get stuck out like a solid board in consequence: a saddle that attacked Mark in his right buttock with an obstinate ferocity.

Mark took his cycle to the road. As he did so a clinker clanker came up the yard. It was Whisky dragging the bicycle pump. Mark couldn't have got half way without that pump.

"Whisky, you're wonderful. I don't understand you, but I love you." And he picked the dog up. Then Whisky let him go quietly. Whisky understood—everything. There wasn't a thing, in the world he didn't understand!

Taking his cycle out to the road Mark said out loud: "Kari, you're also marvellous. I don't understand you either but I damn nearly love you too."

The wind was rising beyond the River.

24

MARK jabs a sandwich in his pocket, straps a school book to the bar, ties a tea flask to the carrier, cuts a passage through the night.

Cuts a passage through the night, through a land the moon licks milky like a winding sheet on nature, past a rye field tipped in silver like the coffers of the goblins, past a pylor pale and pasty, past a hay-rick gaunt and ghostly, whowk hoots an owl, whack croaks a toad, the devil's alive on this sleep riddled road. Gray grows the grass, white lies the wheat; pepper and salt on this earth's winding sheet.

Crashes a corner. Laps a bend.

Slices a turn.

O hurry, hurry, there's a life to save, there's time to race.

So many miles. So few hours.

This way! This way!
O down, down with the pedal, down! Push, push!
Faster! Faster! Here's one man Kāri will not say has
failed her.

The damn nattering aspens.
The damn chattering alders.
The wind is talking ghost stories to itself in the hills.
Damn ungainly student.
Damn ungainly cycle.
Burning the road up, London bound.
How large is the world! How gray is the world,
Mark passes alone.
How warm is the world! How asleep is the world,
Mark passes alone.
How old is the world! Everyone must snuggle each
to each like families of bumble bees.

Here are three temporary outsiders, the Clock, the
Night and Mark all crowded on one bicycle, hurtling,
hustling, skidding, scrambling, jolting, thudding,
three screaming maniacs bursting their bowels out,
quarrelling like hell as they ride like hell through a
Spectreland to London.

Now the wind has finished its talking in the hills
and is riding straight at Mark.

On! On!

Push. Down.

Down. Down.

The Coventry Iron creaks out its own cacophony in
chorus with the noises of the night.

Down!

Down the winding, wandering byway, up to the
straight deserted highway. Up to the straight deserted
highway, like a moonbeam laid to London, like a blade
of new made steel, straight as an arrow, shot through
the slumbering fields of Essex, shot to miss all towns
and hamlets, plunging out sharp from Epping Forest,

into the grey and sleep-locked Leyton, into the eastern gut of London.

Comes wind.

Comes cloud.

Comes Kari.

At Auschwitz. Screwed his eyes back. Soft they were. Screw motion. Then screwed them out again. Right out. Twelve inches. Snip! Out they came. Just a demonstration to make the others talk.

Shut up Kari!

At Lublin. He overslept for the roll call. Hear him howling and the howling of the dogs as they tear him to pieces. Poor dear. Just a demonstration to save the others oversleeping.

Shut up!

At Buchenwald. Koch it was. Two years before the war. Had a gypsy in a wooden box, just room for crouching, nails driven in everywhere: hear the gypsy screaming when he moved and the nails pierced him! Funny. Till he dies. Funny. Just as a demonstration to frighten others off escaping.

Shut up! Shut up! Trying to help to save your life: then keep the ghosts of your hell-camps out of this ride this night. "Someone must think of them Marky: someone ought to remember. They died that their cries might cleanse the world."

I think Kari. At least you have made me do that. But keep the nightmares from me now.

"So that you can think of them in armchairs Marky? O everyone does that. That's self erotics. Everyone has a swim in an armchair. But REMEMBER Marky, really remember! Because it's coming again you know?"

Push. Push.

Down. Down.

A damn fine life to save: pure . . . a pure sadist. Yet,

with Whisky, the only live thing in Mark's world. And there's always an explanation at hand. Twenty-five medals. Why she must be a saint to have earned twenty-five medals! There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so: against all the facts that man can muster, love will ever be blind. And Mark would offer Kari love . . . or near love.

Hadamar. 10,000 victims and then a party to celebrate the next.

No, Kari!

Buchenwald, wasn't it? 60,000 babies taken from their mothers and thrown to the furnaces.

NO, KARI!

Auschwitz. Five and a half million dead. Starvation was the nearest anyone ever came to a natural dying.

NO!!!!

Mark jumps off.

He screams to the elements: "Kari, there's a newspaper game going on in Piccadilly at 8 o'clock this morning. It can save your life if I am there. Then keep the succuba of your sadism out of my mind this night else I am riding back!"

And he turns his cycle.

(Just as a demonstration.)

Then he turns it once more back and facing London.

The wind stirs taffeta talking in the trees, it wrestles in the bushes, sharpens its tentacles against Mark's face, turns the telegraph wires into tuning forks . . . the damn wind has got haunted itself and is muttering away looking for a place to hide.

Mark seizes his cycle. Leaps the saddle. Rides possessed as madmen are. Yet it seems the trees stand still and he moves not on an inch. Faster, faster and yet still faster till he cuts the road and scythes the wind. yet still the trees stand stock still and he is petrified he will cycle all the night and never gain one pace.

On!

Faster! Faster!

There's a life to save.

On. On.

Now the sky sags in. Like a tent pushed in by Satan. Two clouds snap as double doors and bludgeon out the moon.¹ The stars are shot down one by one like bull's eyes at a rifle range. The shadows run terrified all round the bushes and all is black. The ghoul night has become a wolf's mouth.

The storm bursts.

Stair-rods of rain come bucketing down.

Chucked down right at Mark.

Cats and giraffes of rain.

Ice rain.

The wind sends a howl through the throat of the night. It jostles and juggles about with a youth on a cycle. Yet still the little splinter of his light from his lamp persists onwards on.

Down! Push! On he rides.

The last grey pencil stroke is stricken from the sky.

Stilts and lances lash at the rider.

Lightning flashes. It lights up a piano wire of rain strung down from heaven and it sharpens up a hill like a razor. Then click; all is black again, as if a camera shutter has been closed.

What men will do for the ladies! Here comes Sir 20th century Wilde on a 10th century bicycle. Bet nothing will be appreciated. Will arrive in Piccadilly with one puff left and bet he doesn't get a thank you. Gratitude's out. Everything's out these days. Not a virtue left. A good deed done is the first thing trodden on. Swinishness is the god these days. And callousness the philosophy.

Bloody weather.

Bloody England.

In any other country a night that started like this one did would have been a month removed from what this is now.

Rain on his cheeks.

Wind on his chest.

Blindly. Quickly. Pushing this incongruous conglomeration of metal up to London.

O faster, faster, faster!

The noble profession of architecture ought to be thought upon, but . . . Bloody exams!

No bloody architecture for six bloody years while Kari and her bloody ilk had their wars. Mark Builds: Kari knocks down. Insane children, the Karis; not allowed to knock buildings down now, so they have to knock people down.

When a Nazi pushed a man over a cliff he called him a paratrooper.

O marvellously funny.

When a Nazi tattooed a number on a prisoner he said: That's your Visiting Card.

Screamingly funny.

When a Jew arrived at Auschwitz he was given a ticket in receipt for his hat, another for his coat, one for his trousers and one for his shoes; then he was sent for a bath . . . and the gas was turned on . . .

A killing sense of humour these sadists have!

The wheels must twist a hundred thousand times and Mark must scar the night.

Past hedge: past fence.

Past ditch.

The world spins in an infinite of space and Mark must touch the end.

Through rain: through wind.

Through storm.

This way! This way!

Blindly. Quickly.

He thinks of Iris warm as toast in bed,
He thinks of Joan and her dreaming of princes,
He thinks of Whisky thinking of Steerin,
He thinks of glass rain
In a tubular night.

He thinks of bodies writhing before him,
Ten million eyes despairing all round him,
Ten million mouths with but one cry "Bread!"
In a tunnel night.

He thinks of his stomach sick with nerve,
He thinks of his brain crammed ill with learning,
He thinks of his limbs like lacerated lead,
In a cavernous night.

He thinks of this fight with this hell-possessed wind,
Of this goose-flesh typing of this rain on his cape,
He thinks of this loneliest ride of his life
In this lonely night.

He thinks of Kari so blissfully sleeping,
With her ghost up there squat up on his shoulders,
Larking and leering, taunting and sneering,
Riding him like hell as he rides like hell into this
mouth of this pit called Night.

25

MARK rode into Piccadilly with half a minute to spare.
The newspaper was underneath the arm.

26

THE morning of the examinations came.
The examinations were held in the Town Hall
Council Chambers.

Tiny and Mark were the first to arrive!

"How do you do Tiny?"

"How do you do Mark?"

“I’m all right.”

“Aren’t the rest a late bunch?”

“Indeed they are,” said Tiny. “I’ve given up hope of reforming them. We should make a new law.”

A man with brass buttons arrived.

“What, no bugles, my old cockspurrows?” said Pills, hurrying in all smiles and bounce again as if by magic.

He with buttons was an officer. He would stop their cheating if he saw it.

They were all assembled now.

“Come on chaps, let’s go down singing!” Pills cried.

“We’re off!!!”

‘Architectural History.’

Scribble. Scribble. Scribble.

Scribble. Scribble. Scribble.

Only Flash Rod was late.

Is there champagne for the one who first finishes?

‘Should Modern Architecture keep to astylar tradition or develop a style of its own?’ A style of its own! O that was a gift from the gods. Why they asked for a personal opinion, what was the matter? The one and only in nine papers: but Mark did not know that yet.

‘Finished! The next dish please!’

And Flash Rod had missed his first exam.

And the next dish was Architectural History, Specialized; that same afternoon.

Easy, nothing in these papers. Every question has been asked before. Why not let the students set them? They know what’s coming.

Where was Flash?

Then that night up till four a.m. swotting up Construction: and Kari calling it Destruction in between the pages. And what was to be with Kari? Was he ever to see her again? What had happened to her? He had telephoned her in the North and told her the news and

now only knew that she must not come to London: and that she should leave England as soon as she possibly could. Then swotting over breakfast; then swotting in the tramcar; then again in the lavatory before the examination began; last desperate glances at Mark's most hateful subject. Shovelling it last time home before belching it back up in a minute. Swotting in the lavatory!—perfect. Heaven: when to-day is over.

Flash was absent again that morning!

Easy. Easy. Easy. Phew! All this swotting gone on little else.

Roderick had not been seen at all. Where *was* he? And what would happen to that practice in South Africa now?

27

MARK met Quarrel looking very downcast.

“It's my cousin's little boy, Tommie: you remember, the bright one?”

“Yes, I remember,” said Mark.

“In the Juvenile Court.”

“Why?”

“Stealing.”

“Stealing?”

“Sweets from a confectioners.”

“Dear o dear,” said Mark. “But that's only human for a child.”

“Not like this,” said Quarrel. “Some sort of kleptomania.”

“How?”

“Three times in three weeks now,” said Quarrel. “He seems possessed, like a maniac, as if he *has* to do it. As if something will happen to him if he doesn't. I never mentioned it before. I hoped it was nothing. The third time was yesterday. They are afraid he

might be sent away. What a worrying thing to happen in examination times!"

"Mysterious," said Mark.

"I saw Kari about it last week," said Quarrel. "I hope you don't mind. She seemed to have such an influence with the boy I thought she might help."

"And?"

"She said she'd love to. But it really was no sense her seeing him at all. There was nothing she could think of. I think she might have tried if she had known it might happen again, she's a wonderful influence and I know she said she would do anything in the world if there was only something she could do. But now I fear it'll be too late. The parents are nearly out of their minds. And Kari will be very upset about it I know."

LARRY came up and asked someone to explain some Mechanics to him. Pills tried. Quarrel tried. Then Mark took Larry aside and said, "Honestly," he said, "I know nothing about Mechanics, Larry."

"But you are always top of the class," said Larry.

"Yes, listen, I'll tell you." And Mark explained. "Since my first day here, with Froghorn, I could never understand a thing. Actually I know absolutely nothing. But every examination paper I have seen—and I got a collection for twenty-five years out of the library—I have seen that every seven out of ten questions are set on one of sixteen formulæ. I know them by heart. I don't know what they mean. I do no revision, never have: I always think someone will find me out: you see I know nothing. But it's been my highest mark in my every examination yet."

He wrote down sixteen very simple formulæ and said:

“Learn those: it will take you five minutes: and the pass is yours.”

Larry was agitated. It was Mark’s first realisation that others were as nervous as himself. Larry said the idea was wonderful, but he couldn’t grasp it; he was in such a torment in his head that he could not possibly concentrate a second. He didn’t want his father’s butcher’s shop, what was he to do?

Mark explained again.

“But why? But why?” Larry implored.

“Why? I don’t know. I swear I know nothing. Not a damn thing. But there’s your pass ticket,” said Mark.

“Yes but why does B.M. = $\frac{WL}{8}$? What does it mean.

“Listen quietly,” said Mark. “You know what B.M. is?”

“Bending Moment.”

“Right. You know what W. is?”

“Weight.”

“Weight per foot run. And L?”

“Length.”

“Yes.”

“When a question comes asking for a bending moment stating specifically Wt. per ft. run and length, jump at it with the formula and pray for the best: it never fails. Though why $B.M. = \frac{WL}{8}$ I have no idea. It’s the same with the rest. Just those sixteen formulæ. You’ll pass.”

But everything was beyond Larry. He could not think of anything: except of red meat and oxen.

“Write those sixteen formulæ on a piece of blotting paper, on your shirt, nails, anything,” said Mark once more; “and you’ll pass.” And he left him.

Drawn Construction came and went. There was only The Theory of Architecture left.

All this time there had been no single sign of Flash. What was this mystery? And what would be now with that practice his grandfather and mother were keeping for him with such difficulty?

The Theory of Architecture paper was before Mark. A storm rose up in his brain. In heaven's name isn't *here* a paper where somebody oughtn't to want to know something? Didn't the R.I.B.A. want to hear *his* theory? What *was* this paper? Define this and that. Define duality. Explain why . . . Mark had ideas, Mark had a brain, Mark had *thought* about the Theory of Architecture; he had a theory; he'd worked it out; wasn't anyone going to ask him? Do you mean that a subject like this can pass without a glimmer of individual thinking being requested? No, he couldn't do it.

He placed his pen down.

He loved writing. He loved the very art, the formation of the sentences; even the building of the letters. Since thirteen he had been loving writing. His pen ruled him. If his pen did not want to write a word, his hand cramped, his arm stiffened; he could not force his pen. He let his pen win, he listened to it, he obeyed it. He knew his pen obeyed his instinct, which was greater than his surface self.

No, he could not write this paper. Mark was a child; in his ways, hopeless. Each limb was a separate being to him: his limbs were much as players on a football field, separate units yet together. They had compromised with his right arm, saying 'Take us through till Friday, never mind: on Friday you can write with a will behind you.' Yet Mark was not a child any more than his own knowing: for if this was childish, he loved it.

Here was trouble. He raised his pen. He doodled on the blotting pad. He wanted to write what he thought of the question paper, hand it in and be gone. He would like to let Whisky loose in this room.

Scribble. Scribble. Scribble.

Scribble. Scribble. Scribble.

There they all were. What were they scribbling? What *could* they be scribbling? What was there to say?

He wished Whisky would push open those revolving doors and rush all round wagging and wagging that tail of his. No one would appreciate it. This room had been frozen into silence: if a laugh came in no one would recognise it. Whisky should tear round till he had made them all laugh: put muddy paws over all their papers, grab their pens and rush round with them in his mouth: 'catch me if you can, if you can, if you can.'

Mark rose. He put his pen in its niche and said out loud:

"I can't."

It was the first words spoken in that room for a week. People looked up startled. Thank heaven they were startled: at least there was that much to their scribbling silent forms. It relieved him. He wished to say:

'Can you answer this paper? God what is it? What is it? A test of what? Theory of Architecture?' He sat down. The officer had said nothing. No one dare speak! The frozen maniacs. He knew a funny story: would anyone like to hear it? They'd all love to hear it, but not here. But he might forget it . . .

He looked at the paper.

Buses in Piccadilly: reindeer in Alaska: ice-floes near Greenland: the river as it runs by Cambridge: a wife waiting round some corner; he would like to marry Nefertete . . .

He found an inoffensive question and did it. One done. Six more.

He found another. Half way through the next he was overcome with nausea, and his arm froze up on him; his fingers became like heavy lead and no force less than dynamite could stir that pen.

He went to the officer and said:

“I’m not quite well. Might I go to the lavatory please?”

“Er—yes: all right. You haven’t any books up your sleeve I suppose?”

“No,” Mark smiled in return. “I’m not going to cheat.”

The officer felt safe: the student did look seedy.

“Thanks very much,” said Mark.

“That’s all right. Try not to be too long.”

Mark sat in the lavatory, head in hands; and felt that now out of that room he could come round slowly and then he would be able to continue. He felt he had been cheated. He loved writing and this afternoon he was to have shown a spark of something individual: the examiners would have said ‘he has something, even if his other papers aren’t first class.’ But no one would know. People in moulds could take these examinations.

He returned, relieved.

“Thanks very much,” he said

The others looked up slightly.

“Hallo, mummies: why don’t you speak? What are you thinking? Struck dumb there like empty icebergs.”

At the end of two more questions he once more rose and laid his pen down and said distinctly:

“I can’t!”

He wanted to tell the R.I.B.A. something. For the R.I.B.A. had recognised this School and its examinations. He could answer these questions as easily as

drinking tea: but what is this? They wanted to know what one single text-book said, when it was on their shelves all the time. He had read it himself an hour ago and now he'd put his book on his shelf. They'd got it on their shelves and would probably take it down to check his answers: now he'd hidden his like a game and they won't show him their's like a game and he has to see if he can get it down like a game: just a Christmas Party game boys: this the test, the test for this Noblest of Professions. He had never written with his memory: that was just a store, a body, but never the head of writing. Now his memory was undergoing a surgical operation and it rebelled.

It was all the climax of a gigantic cramming he had rebelled against all through. It was the climax of studying amidst heartrending noise, continual lack of sleep, of the infernal intrusions of Miss Sensuality Kari, and the cries she had rammed into him rising up from the camps.

Soon now he could forget all this. Then why had he learned it?

30

IN half an hour it was all over for all of them.

Mark flung an ink-well to a wall. He knocked Tiny's case from his hand and emptied it. He flung his text-books round. Tiny dived at him. Pills joined. In rushed Larry. And the four fought. Over and over. Wallop! Quarrel was on a stool pensively breaking up rubber and chalk and slowly shying it at them.

“Hi!” And they rushed at Quarrel.

Then they all went to one side of the room and with piles before them, said:

“Ready? Fire!”

And everything from wood-blocks to set-squares went hurtling against the opposite wall.

“Crawlmore!” cried Quarrel. (The caretaker.)

They scrambled out through the window.

Out to the playground.

Mark jumped on a cycle and chased Pills. The pace was mad. Who cares? Nearly a spill. “You’re ‘he’!”: and Pills chased Mark. The others were to join in but watched instead. Mark was flashing round; round dustbins, under beams, whizzing corners at less than forty-five degrees slant.

“Be careful!”

“Let them go, let them go,” said Tiny, “this is the best thing I’ve seen for years.”

A crash? No. Mark braked, swerved twice and was out like a snake. A miracle. Pills laughed. And dashed off. Mark had caught Pills quickly; it did not seem that Pills would ever catch Mark. The cycling was of stadium standard. The shouting grew. Quarrel was certain a neck would crack soon.

And the three climbed up on the shed roof for shelter. Larry and Tiny sat but Quarrel stood—they might come up on the roof—you can’t tell with these maniacs.

In the length of the playground Mark tried four times to turn: in anticipated swerves Pills checked him. But the pace was high. Knowing what he was about Mark rushed at the shed, bobbed, braked, rushed through three lengths and was turning out. But Pills had not realised the proximity of the shed. He saw it too late and in the last despairing second let go his bars and flung his arms out crash against the roof. His cycle dashed on and smashed helter skelter against the debris and the wall, breaking and twisting beyond all recognition and repair.

Pills grabbed desperately for the roof, but couldn't hold it, and was shot sharply to the ground . . .

They all came down frightened to see him. Mark was sheet-white, Tiny was sick-green, and Larry tallow-yellow, while Quarrel just refused to look at all; he thought only of Phoebe.

And there among their four nerve-strained faces, the one out there on his buttocks on the ground—legs and arms up in the air like a table at sea in a shipwreck—that one down there they were all so in terror about was just laughing and yelling and bawling out: "I've got to hand it to you, Mark, old chappie, for an amateur you'll pass, you'll pass."

If you had been walking down the crowded High Street of Clucktown later that evening, you would suddenly have been surprised to have seen five wild students mounted on their cycles side by side tearing by with five toilet rolls tied to their carriers, undone and open fully and streaming to glory in the breezes for well nigh a hundred yards behind them.

Yes.

Five wild student .

For Flash, the sixth, had missed his whole examination and with it, it would seem, his dream of the practice in South Africa.

Two days after Mark had spoken with Kari on the telephone she had dared to come to London.

But Fate played her foully.

Krautz, the brother of whom she had shot years ago in Paris and who was bent on revenge, to avoid whom she had left London, had delayed his return to Europe by twenty-four hours longer than she had been informed and to his astonishment he saw her in Piccadilly. It was yet afternoon and he would await his chance until the cover of night.

In Jermyn Street Kari looked down below her at the Princes Arcade but for once there was no tall dark shadow there. She telephoned. For two hours she telephoned. First she telephoned for he who was now her shadow everywhere: for she had a use for this sickly guardian this fearful night. The time for the crucifixion was here. Then she telephoned Mark. She told him he was not to think about anything, somehow she would see him before he left for his travels, she did not know how but she would arrange it. Then she telephoned to Sweden to Roland. She would meet him in Finland. Later. Would he try and get transferred to Spain after that? She told him he would be seeing his brother Mark in Finland also. Then she telephoned her father and gave him his instructions; which he said he would gladly keep. She liked her father's voice. There was a warm quality in that charm. Yes, her father had something. She felt it now quite definitely. He only seemed to have lost the backbone of his character somewhere early in his life. But she was glad to feel the warmth.

For hours she gathered together those vital articles necessary. But her passport needed a little further doctoring before she could leave for King's Cross, and she could only have that done in London; and so at midnight she went to her window again . . . and now the long shadow was there: he had been a long time coming! She left for North Audley Street, walking. The long and sombre shadow followed after her. For

months he had been her constant follower. One hour in North Audley Street and she returned, walking. Once more the long shadow trailed behind her. Grosvenor Street was empty. She turned into Bond Street.

A cat: a rat on a roof: a newspaper blowing away from a dustbin. Past the passage called Bloomfield Place.

Out leapt a small and stocky figure brandishing a knife.

It was Krautz. .

The tall shadow form darted forward and closed upon the smaller man in an instant, and dragged him back into the unlit passage.

Seconds later, rushing down the all-but deserted Bond Street yelling at random 'Taxi taxi' half knocking Kari over, half turning to apologize, tore the terrified form of the small and stocky Krautz.

And cluttering up the lightless Bloomfield Place was the dead gaunt figure—blood spurting out from his waistcoat like a sparkler of red roses—

of

Flash Rod.

32

THE results came through.

The Head came in to their room with all the masters and the students sat round and waited.

Each one was confident. Each one was certain.

"There have been no passes," said the Head.

What??? Kari, you swine, what have you done?

"There has been one pass with one reservation of completing two more design subjects."

Ah!!! But only *one*? Each still stayed confident: of course it was he. Mark felt sorry for the others but

knew that that pass was his. Tiny was equally sure.
“And that is Geoffrey Quarrel.”

Geoffrey Quarrel was delighted: swelled out: and tried to show nothing; proud to the nth degree. You could feel him glow out.

Pills went as white as a sheet anchor, and was all but sick on the spot. He had told Phoebe that if he passed he would marry her and if he didn’t he would not: so very cock-sure he had been. And she had been cock-sure too and hadn’t stopped smiling for a week.

“Well done Geof.” It was Larry who spoke out first.

“Yes, yes, of course,” some others said, unconvincingly. The tension held.

“You have a complete pass in everything: your marks . . .” And Quarrel’s marks were read out.

The Head seemed to be dragging their death-knell out. Mark had never known the Head like this. Slow.

“Laurence Lowler,” said the Head, continuing at last, “you have a pass subject to completing two design subjects and sitting for your Mechanics examination once more. We suggest you try and take special coaching in this.

So others *were* through? With minor reservations. Why must the Head be so sadistic in his announcements?

Come on, come on, the other results!

“Richard Havoc,” said the Head. “You are rather fortunate. Pills sat up. “You had only 47 in General History but we, with Mr. Mathicstone Pride’s consent, raised it to the necessary 50: so that you now have a pass, subject to finishing your Measured Drawings.”

Pills jumped up and madly darted out of the room and down the corridor. Yes: to the Needlecraft room. The bells will ring.

Why must the Head prolong all this? He was reveling in the slowness of his announcements, and delayed

before proceeding with each next student.

Well? Well? Who now?

“Mark Johnstone Wilde.” Ah! “Mark Wilde, you, I’m sure we are all surprised, have a pass.” Surprised? No surprise at all: Mark had always felt certain. Halleluhal! “Subject to . . .” O to hell with the reservations! a pass, a pass: good-bye examinations! “You must have excelled yourself as you passed in all your written papers.” ‘Excelled?’ He knew it! “You had some close shaves, in Drawn Construction and Surveying you had only 50 exactly. Frankly: we are surprised: though we congratulate you. We had decided that since your portfolio lacked so many construction sheets you should be allowed your certificate only subject to another year’s study at the School in Construction and Design; while of course your written results would have stood over and counted. But our visiting examiner Sir Rowland Rowlandson pressed for your pass and Mr. Mathiestone Pride here supported him. Sir Rowland evidently sees something to your drawings which Mr. Froghorn and I myself frankly do not see. He said you would learn your construction in offices, that there were no worries about your design, which he says shows a distinct individuality, and he pressed that we should pass you subject to the completion of one design subject and a further portfolio of Measured Drawings.”

‘Cheers for Sir Rowland and Mathiestone Pride!’

“Reginald Dukeson.” Yes? All cars were waiting. How they would like it if Tiny might pass. They would cheer. “You are, I’m afraid, the one complete failure.”

‘Damn! Damn damn damn!’ Half said that. Tiny cracked inside. And never in his life recovered. He felt he must have something: with all these others with their passes subject to reservations. Nothing. His

marks were hopeless: he had three passes only: then Mechanics 27; Surveying 31; something else 18 . . . Tiny was the best there! He had architecture in his veins! He had only finished three of his papers. But he thought that that would mean that they would mark him on what he had done: no, they marked on what he hadn't done.

The five others commiserated with Dukeson.

If Mark had had an experience a little while back that had made him a man, now Tiny had an experience which left him for all time less than he had ever been before.

There are points which change a person. And this was that point with Tiny. For the rest of his life on earth he would never quite be that person he had been before that morning. He would not say it because he could never brag, but deep in his heart of hearts he knew, as they all knew, he was the king of architects among them. Listed bottom. What is this? He was to be denied the profession? And so the only ornament that that profession might have picked up in Clucktown was lost to Architecture that day. (For he could never pass: he just had not an examination mind.) Tiny's confidence, his unquestioned certainty in his own ability, had been broken never to recover.

PART IV

MARK got out of the train at Crewe. School was finished and he was on his way to Belfast and to Greenland. The platform was deserted. He saw a policeman and asked for a tea bar.

“Way, way at the other end,” said the policeman. “You’ve scarcely time to walk it’s so far.”

Mark thought Crewe would be alive. It was 1 o’clock at night. An inky atmosphere everywhere. An atmosphere as if the train had had no right to stop there. As if Crewe was in its first sleep so heavy did it sleep.

A figure, so silently as to be ephemeral, left the darkness and crossed the platform into the last carriage of the train.

A lamp shook in the breeze.

Mark walked up the platform and into the first carriage.

The train left.

Mark saw the tea bar as the train pulled out. It looked more off the station than on it. It was open but nothing open ever appeared more closed.

Chug, chu chu, chug, chu chu, chug, chu chu: the Brobdingnagian worm left to burrow into the night.

So much sleeping was being going on with. Down the never ending corrido's Mark wandered, wondering, since he seemed to go so far, when he would arrive back at Euston.

At last, his carriage. But no, it could not be, someone was there. But it was his carriage. Had the lone traveller chosen here? . . .

Karit!!

He went in quickly but made no demonstration. He said softly:

“Kari, Kari, Kari, oh I am so glad to see you! Is it all right to talk?”

“Yes, Mark. I came in here because I saw your harmonica on the seat.”

“O, Kari: lascivious, lustful, seductive, sensual, libidinous grape, I was so worried I would not see you again or know what was up with you. Is it all right, and can I kiss you?”

“Mr. Wilde, this is so sudden! Pull the blinds down.”

“Oh I did so worry about you! Tell me, tell me all: what will it be, how will it be?”

“I will get to Finland and meet Roland there.”

“Oh wonderful, wonderful.”

They talked of her plans. Spain: she seemed determined to go to Spain. But the first thing was to leave England and the last thing would be to be seen in London.

O the grape and the honey dew, the hydromel and the nectar of the saints and the devils all neatly kneaded.

“Kari,” he said, holding her closely; “are you saint or devil?”

“You wouldn’t like me to be a devil, Marky, and I wouldn’t like to be a saint; so,” she kissed him, “I’ve decided,” she kissed him, “to you,” she kissed him, “to you perhaps only,” she kissed and kissed him, “to be a good devil. One,” she was kissing him all the time, “who is good to you in heart and spirit but a devil in love.”

He was feeling uncontrollable.

“That’s if,” she said, “you’ll let me try and love you?”

“That’s if,” he said, “you’ll let *me* try and love *you*.”

"Try, dear one," she said, "and perhaps, who knows, I might be looking just for such a someone with courage enough and love enough to ride to heaven with the devil?"

"O, Kari, must we separate? Must I go to Greenland, and you to Finland?"

"Would you like to go to Finland too?" she said so coyly, kissing him lightly.

"Yes."

"Then we must see what we can do, mustn't we?" she said smiling.

"That smile came from inside you. It was the loveliest smile I ever saw. Did you smile inside then?"

"Never in all my life . . . Yes I did. Because I think . . . you . . . like me just a little."

"You're the prettiest witch in the business," said Mark. "You're stealing me."

"Goody, goody, goody. Mark; quick," she kissed him very rapidly; "the ticket inspector."

Mark jumped opposite and they sat like two people taking orders for the church.

The ticket inspector came and left.

"Where's your ticket for?" Mark asked her.

"Dublin," she said. "I thought we would say good-bye in Dublin before you leave for Belfast."

"If we say good-bye," he said.

A **PERFUME** like faded rose petals in a china jar was in the air. A potent, carnal creature was this before him.

Her eyebrows were 'arched like fish hooks, though he would now say, as the crescent moon; her skirt was as black as crunched beetles and sickened the blood, though he would now say it was molten ebony; her

eyes, like crocodiles', were green as grass and acting as cover to mines of ill sulphur, though he could now only see them as liquid emeralds, veiling burning amber. A little volcano this, sitting calmly opposite him like ice, yet he would tell you she was as a frozen lake while all around beat tumult. She became canker in a man and he would cling to her as a wet dish cloth might to a sharp nail—but he would say now merely that she had clogged his soul with hydromel and he was drinking.

How the engine sends out white sheep to graze in the grey of the groves. How miniature is this England; a tree, a foundry chimney, a lake, all in the compass of a half a mile: a factory, alive and flaming, a tiny activity in a cup of night; then a farm silhouetted and asleep; then an industrial town, with a curtain of slumber to cover up such brutish eye-sores from our gazes . . .

“Yes, Kari?” She was speaking to him.

“You are as silent as dew when it falls upon roses,” she smiled.

“I wish you and I were one!” said Mark, “so that I could go in you and with you wherever you go.”

She put her gloved hand forward on to his and with her eyes said: Ask it, ask it. Did she want him to ask that fatal question? He felt she was pressing him to ask. A wanted, hunted lady: wouldn’t it be of joy to her if he would ask? He felt so much she was pressing for something: and with her whole life in such jeopardy, shouldn’t he declare his love, though still yet it was not wholly in him as he knew a love should be.

Yes she was speaking to him:

“Always stay just as you are Mark. Better if you lead, because if one blind person follows another blind person, before long they both fall in the vat, don’t they?”

“If I had a fortune, you could have it,” said Mark.

“A fortune, Mark?” said Her Unctiousness looking at him seriously in his eyes. “A fortune is only the money of the meaner man, Mark; brain is the money of the greater man. One evening’s conversation with an honest mind, Mark, is worth a lifetime with a Money-Bag—it is even worth ten years of study, come to that. Even if a man has a fortune, if he is a Stupid Lord he has less than enough: yet though a man has no penny and arms out at the elbows,” she put her hand lightly on his elbows, “if he has a forthright mind he has more than enough; threadbare and you can still be a heaven and an earth in miniature, while a millionaire will remain but a clothes-frame. Gold and silver, Mark, may have their measure, but value your heart and your mind and you can become beyond measure. Pphh!” she said sitting back, “wealth is dung, Mark: a bright face is the gold that counts: I like what Confucius said: what the superman seeks is in himself, and what the small man seeks is in others.”

“Kari! . . .”

“I will give you the proverbs for your life, Mark,” Her Lustfulness went on sitting right back now . . . Mark was feeling a mysterious out-growing in his being . . . “Be content with just what is sufficient to pass by this day with. Be wary of any new enterprise that needs new clothes. Remember that kindness is higher than law. Convert all great quarrels into little ones, and little ones into nothing. If you wish to break a friendship do it without unpleasant words. Remember that when happiness comes the mind grows more intelligent. Wander your winding way over the face of this earth, Mark, like an unfettered stream and remember that scenery is there to be filled up with mind. Be wary: the more lives you lead the more deaths you will have to die. How I know that. He is

lucky who meets a friend: he is unlucky who meets a fair lady." She smiled. Then kept right on, "If your virtues exceed your talents you are a superior man, Mark; but if your talents exceed your virtues you are a mean man. Do not be superior in front of others and mean in secret. Do not have one mouth and two tongues."

"Kari! . . . I never knew . . ."

"You never knew, that you never knew . . . me?" said Kari. "Why shouldn't there be more me's than just the Camp me . . . You didn't know I had read books of Chinese proverbs?"

"But they are in your head too," said Mark. "And now you have given them to me. How much of you, Kari, is the Concentration Camp you?"

"We never spoke of any other me, did we?" asked Kari.

"Never."

"How much would you think, Mark, my dear one?"

"Shall we say only one per cent Kari?"

"Shall we Mark? Shall we say that?"

"I love you, deeply," he said.

"Then come, Mark, come. Let's love with our lips: not words."

And the train had done better to have kept on round the world than to have interrupted that kiss at Holyhead.

THERE is a vast variety in the male species that occupy this globe and in a tiny minority are Mark and others whose lust is turned to love through their minds. They do not obey the dictates of their loins, but if their minds are sufficiently tickled, their minds release the latch that allows the waters of libidinousness to flood out

Lust and stand it up as Statued Love.

Many are those who will not allow this as possible, that Nature's greatest wonder, Love, can be so calmly, coldly calculated as to allow the mind to be its supervisor; we can only insist, that he, ,Mark, who had always prided himself upon living according to Nature and Instinct, did nevertheless not do so and proved it otherwise here and now; and having kissed and caroused with a lady—his brother's love too!—for weeks and months, with his mind endlessly ticking it back to his conscience that it was not interested, it had suddenly that evening in the space of about twenty sentences, struck him, conscience, loins, mind, body, heart and soul and all, that he *was* interested to the degree that interested is not the word at all.

No. The word is the grandest one in our tongue. And Love it is. Madly, insanely in love. In love in a land where he had trodden for months but had seen no sun until this minute.

O!

The fat is in the fire.

4

ONE guard at Holyhead was calling to another:

“Ere Mick, I thought you said we left London with two rabbits?”

“Yus mate.”

“Then there's three of the perishers now.”

Through the yellow dingy halls, through the Customs sheds of the corrugated iron: they had passed Kari through! luggage, passport all were through!... Perhaps at Kingstown they would stop her.

If Kari had ever love in her heart thought Mark, she had it that night.

She kissed Mark all over his face with a warmth and affection she had never done before.

A meandering rain cloud dropped a few pennies in the water in an absent-minded way. Then threw a sackful of pearls in to join them. And then it went off; wandering. As her Mark was wanting to go.

The harbour lights held a bleared and sleep-bound conversation. Just one, caught in a night breeze, was awake playing winky winky with itself in the water.

Take the weather away and they say the English would have nothing to talk about.

And the bright new Irish Mail Boat pulled out to sea. No one could see the Holy Hill, no one could see the Skerries, no one could see the hammer in Mark's heart nor the purring that went on in Kari's. Night covered the Holy Mount and night covered the Skerries, while, in our world, what beats on in another's breast is almost always covered.

The South Stack Lighthouse lit up the ship in flashes and further inland the North Stack Lighthouse smirked back in consort. And so affectionate was Kari that Mark felt that her light flashed in him, and Kari feeling the warmth that had taken possession of Mark drew it on and out.

And out from the shelter of the Welsh hills and mountains, out from the land locked harbour, out the ship went.

And the Irish Sea is a little sea: but oh! the tumults it has had.

Yet now was so calm. And the moon was, as ever, generous with its diamonds that it passed down to the water, handing down bushel loads as carpets on the seas as if for some tale for Hâroun al Raschid. And Mark and Kari went to the stern of the ship, and faced, locked in each other, the tossings that might or might not lay before them.

And Kari begged her companion to play on his harmonica.

And Mark played the melody from the Chopin Study in E. She should have stopped him. O not that! but she bit her lip and let it go on. Four years ago she had been in a car that had pulled up outside a flat in Berlin and the others had gone up to arrest their man, while she, from the car, heard him up there playing . . . The Study in E. Then it had stopped. "Well that's his swan song," she had tittered.

Now she had become so sentimental. She was crying, Perhaps they would arrest *her* as Mark playcd it on this ship? But she really only thought of Berlin. It was a Gordian Knot she had inside her. She used to like to think that that man had never played again. They had frozen his hands as an experiment. Might still be alive. No hands. Serve him right. And yet . . . It *was* a Gordian Knot she had inside her. Was power, sex? Was this never-ending desire to crush every singlc thing as a beetle, sex? Mark had wanted to argue it it out with her so. No, it was like a ruthless rod in her. God, it took some taming. A tiger slept in her. She had tried unending sexual pleasures to try and tame her tiger: she had known some hours of peace but it had been the tiger, wolf, vampire . . . in the end, that had devoured her sex. Power! And to maim! But it was insane. It didn't get anywhere at all. Gilles de Rais killed 400 children and drank their blood: yet was less satiated at the end than when he had begun. The devil does not even let off his own children: flame only feeds flame, eruption, eruption.

Mark had stopped playing.

Tears were coming down her checks.

"Some simple melody," she asked for.

He played an Irish melody.

Honey fell down upon them and Mark could feel

sweet love outpouring from her. For Kari had been many characters but such clogging sweetness had never stirred from her to him before. Overpowering, overpowering, as if she must envelop him. Tenderly, tenderly she asked:

“Mark darling, will you . . . if you go away . . . will you . . . come back?”

“Of course I will, Kari, what a funny question!”

“But . . . will you be away long? And . . . you might meet . . . anybody: and you might stay . . . somewhere.”

“I’ll always come back. And I’ll always come back to you, Kari. There was a man went round the world and came back and decided there was no one as fine as his next door neighbour.”

“And they married I suppose?” she smiled, though she said it softly.

“Yes.” And she could hardly hear his answer, for the beating in their heart-drums.

She pressed his hand again and said . . . just said . . . as if the words would scarcely come up to her mouth from inside:

“Lucky woman, Mark, who will marry you.”

He said nothing.

O God she was lovable: God she was sweet, she was tender, tender . . . And she wanted him to say something, that fatal question, he knew, he knew! To ask, to ask. She was leading him.

“Bloody penniless man to have around, I’d make,” he whispered.

“Kind hearts are more than coronets, darling.” She rested her head against his chest. “Of all species, darling, the poets are more often right than any.”

“I am going to Greenland,” he said. “Tiny is right about your hair, so light the scent, like the breathing of the angels; like dewfall, he says. It has a simple and

yet such a captivating purity about it. Yes, Greenland," he said.

"Or Finland, darling?" she said winningly.

"Or Finland," he answered smilingly . . .

"Dearest . . ." She turned into him. So close. There were some inches of breath between them except that their breath was more like chains that bound them. "You like travelling so much, don't you? What's the most wonderful thing of all about it?"

"To get up in the morning, Kari," he said, "and know that every yard is new, that every hour in front of you is an hour's adventure: not knowing where you can possibly be that next night but that it will be . . . fresh. That . . . and the sky above your head. I have slept in doss-houses and palaces, on mountains and in ditches, I have seen an icefield and an ocean, a volcano erupting, a tornado tearing through a forest, I have seen the sculptures of Egypt and the art of Italy: but there is not one thing that has ever equalled lying under a sky of stars. And that is free, and can be had at any evening. I am so in love with slumber beneath the stars that it is torture to abide under a roof; and never, never do I sleep anywhere on ship except on deck. Tiny said that when the stars sing together it is with your voice. So shall I listen to you and think of you every night, my Kari?"

"I'll be lost without you wherever I am. I don't want you to go, I don't want to lose you."

"You won't lose me, Kari. You have promised that Roland will let me know exactly where you are. We have arranged it all that in some months now we will be meeting, haven't we?"

"O Mark: I don't want to lose you for a minute!"

"I'll keep a place beside my heart brushed," he said. "You can always . . . always . . . O Kari!"

"What darling? What is it?"

“O God, Kari!”

He squirmed. She drew herself into him very tightly.
“What is it, darling?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know . . .”

“Tell me, Mark: you’ll feel better if you tell me . . .”

“No, no . . . I can’t, I can’t! O this is awful!” He pressed her enough to break her.

He let her go. Walked the deck. Came back. Went off again.

“Do tell me, darling, what it is. You’ll be much better afterwards.” God how sweet, how sweet! There has never, never, ever been anybody half as . . . wondrously, simply, beautifully, kindly, touchingly tender . . .

“Kari!”—like a tooth being pulled out! He took her hand, dropped it. No, he’d be alone as he said this, touching nothing. “Kari! perhaps . . . I wonder . . . well you said . . . you weren’t . . . married . . . well, someday . . . perhaps . . . perhaps, you’d . . . if you ever did leave . . . Roland . . . you’d . . . would you perhaps . . . I don’t know . . . well, live with me? or . . . well, perhaps: you and I . . . could be together Kari? . . .”

O that moment as he looked at her! O the wonder, the wonder! Never, never such a being as that! O the wonder! Wide innocence in the eye: kindness in every muscle: only if he could crush her to him! He could not survive were she ever to say no.

“Never,” she said.

“Don’t say that word!!” he screamed.

“Never,” she said.

“No, please, please, Kari, not *that* word! Think, think about it, but not . . .”

“Never. I’ll never come with you, Mark. I really do mean it . . . never.”

Her blood had dried. Nothing ran in her. Mark felt

she had gone to one piece of masonry where she stood. Flint, stone, concrete: just one massed slab. And clammy. And chilly. Like death. Nothing of blood: nothing in her veins at all. Flint, flint. Stone, stone. With the moisture of wet cement or of an icy morning on it.

“Kari! say perhaps, later. Say you’ll think, think . . . Don’t say anything, don’t say anything at all. Just say nothing, nothing . . .”

“But I know now,” said Kari. “It will not be different. I will never come with you at all, Mark.”

“Kari! . . . you . . . you . . . have a little feeling for me?”

“Yes. A little.”

“You . . . just a little . . . little . . . love?”

“Not love, Mark.”

“Not, not at all? Not the tiniest bit?”

“No, Mark.”

“You do, you do . . . like me . . . more than some other people?”

“Perhaps more than some other people; yes Mark.”

She added: “You must know, that if I did want to change from Roland, there are a thousand who affect me more than you do.”

“And Roland?”

“Yes, and Roland.”

Then you don’t bloody well show it!

“I won’t leave Roland. At any rate, not yet,” she said.

Till his dying day Mark would never forget that a being of loving bursting warmth had suddenly become an absolute block of granite. It was as if he had to look round for the being, that the little mouth from which words issued, was, at the most, complimentary, a stone statue fitted up for a game with a speaking device near its top.

Uncanny.

A sadist, a brute, a being filled with hate must at least burn; but this person was absent, had been transformed into a sheer slab of disinterested alabaster.

He would indeed, as he still stared at her, have given a million for the answer to have been different. He would have loved her with every atom of warmth till his dying day. But the answer being written on the wall before him, he flashed it to his vanity in a lightning that had saved him, that it was for no deficiency in himself that he was being handed-out a negative, but . . . as part of a game.

Love games! Kari, you are the most desirable, magnificent, winsome, adorable, beloved creature in this globe, but love is not a game with winners and losers but a march of victory by two victors through this avenue of night we hold as life.

Love games!

Vanity? Vanity? Well why not have it? If it will save me to say it was a trick, I'll have it. "If she be not kind to me, what care I how fair she be?" Yes, the poets are nearly always right! She had said it herself. Next please! God, I wish she had said yes. The first thing is to save myself. I want no unnecessary sad coils. I'll skin Dublin for a red-head. Or a black or a blonde! . . . One who knows that love is love. God, they won't let you have it, some people! Play it like a game of chess, like a battle, like a war. They can keep it! Love's a walk! The only walk that makes the road of life enchanting. I will have it so! God, didn't Kari tell me, she'd give me such hell I'd want to leave, then give me such heaven I wouldn't? What a marriage that would make, when you watch your partner every moment for the next move she will make! Yet I thought she loved me, really, I thought, this evening . . . I asked the question . . . somehow because I felt she

was also wanting it, longing, longing to be told I wasn't just leaving her forever . . . I thought she *deeply* wanted me to ask, and wanted me to say, and how much . . . and wanted proof . . .

Perhaps the bastards will pick her up at Kingstown. I don't like what happened to-night. It was ugly. Brutish, and very ugly. She might mean it that she will . . . I won't use that word . . . not come, with me . . . but nothing was nicely done anyhow.

I'm indifferent if they do take her off to prison . . . and back to answer for her War Crimes as well.

"I've got a bottle of champagne." What's this? She was standing by his side. He was hugging the rope of a life-boat staring out across the sea. Dawn held a glimmer. "I'm sorry about to-night," she was saying. "I went and got the bar attendant to sell me this which he actually had locked away, and I want us to drink to something. That in future, we'll both of us only speak the truth to each other. No more . . ."

She hadn't spoken the truth? He didn't understand. Bloody mystery here.

He didn't want much to open the bottle but she pressed him to. She seemed pathetically in earnest. He didn't know what the hell she meant, and again the flash signal "trick to keep me in, and not let me loose."

She even had two glasses. Pop! What a pop! And the cork flew out to sea. Calm sea: how very peculiar. Storms enough on the boat he supposed: no need for any down there. Now the Hill of Howth surely, looming up like a whale on its back in the morning mist? And the Kish Lightship: yes they are getting near.

"That we only tell each other the truth in future!" she said, proposing the toast. Fantastically in earnest, she seemed. O Kari, mystery lady, what the hell *is* going on? I don't want any bloody games, can you

understand that? It was all right while we just burnt each other up in flesh alone: now to-night you entangled my mind with it. And was that a trick too? Did you fathom out that rigmarole just that you knew it would ensnare me? *Inigma Variations*, as our Irish Elgar might say.

He drank but said nothing. He'd only been telling her the truth ever since they'd met.

A bell buoy cracked a Frankenstein welcome to them in through the chilled dawn.

"I'm sorry about to-night," she ended, after they had drunk. Was she trying to say that she hadn't meant her answer? He wouldn't be asking her that one: let his vanity hold to that. Yes she was trying to say her answer had been a lie: her character had led her in it. He'd stick to that, nonsensical hypothesis or not. The only way of going through life with Kari was to love her for a hundred years and never declare it once.

He had never been a man to beat a dead horse: she had given her answer: he'd take it with a damn and a grin and get back on the hunt for the next one with all alacrity. Long faces never win fair ladies.

Kingstown rubbed its eyes and blinked through the early morning mist to see was this the Irish Mail Boat?

A Golders Green girl had once given Mark the brush-off but found he took so little rebuff and had come up smiling, that she was back nearly on her knees before him next night. No: he took love seriously: Golders Green girls and Kari are welcome to his love on love's fair terms: but he'll keep his games for the football field and chessboard.

Yes, that was Howth. And it was a new day rising. And it was Killiney Hill folding round to Bray Head to the south. And it was Kingstown they were approaching. And it was nervous she was becoming

lest she might be arrested. And why hadn't he said anything to her?

The churches of Kingstown dug their spires into the under gut of heaven.

Perhaps she had said all that refusing because she had known her own character, and, liking him, didn't want to hurt him . . . or that she knew her character would do so in the end? That's a good one: let's have that for the ego! If only he could feed that ego, feed it up fat, then he wouldn't notice the hurts half so much. That's right; she refused him because she was more fond of him than she had ever been of anyone and didn't trust herself not to hurt him. Let him have it like that. Hadn't someone said that the ego, or conceit, acted as ice did for the meat, preserving the whole, and if that failed or was felled, the being, or the meat, didn't long survive? By all means . . . yet she needn't have refused him out of love for him: he would have seen to it that his strength held them both. Thought he! He was already really thinking thus. It did help. Bolster up that ego!

And she was wondering if she would tell him that if he would go to Finland she would come to him and give him his real answer there . . .

But Kingstown came so very quickly on to them. Gliding in they were, like a ship on a slate. With pillows and cushions of clouds pitched hereabouts and thereabouts all over the town like the Sultan's tents. Hardly the Irish Sea at all the way that boat had come across. Nasty rusty iron hinge screech the gulls had. Like very poor relations of the vulture the way they hovered round. Ah, the vulture! Kari liked the vulture. A bird after her heart was the vulture. And the great eagle, the king of the vultures.

May the hearts and the eyes of the Kingstown Police Officers be plucked out. She'd be glad when this

next hour was over and she safe with Mark in Dublin. It was clever to go out with him.

5

MARK thought there seemed a preponderance of peak-capped policemen around the Irish Customs sheds. What do I say if they take me with her? he thought.

Mark and Kari had little luggage and Mark followed Kari searching for a place. Kari seemed quite indifferent where she stopped. She found a place which was vacant and raised her bag. Not even opened! and off she was going. Mark too! But just as he was leaving the Customs Officer said: "What's in here?" and he tapped Mark's harmonica case.

"A musical instrument."

"Can you give us a tune?"

"Of course."

Kari had left his side, calm as a mirror. But if he was to strike up *Mother Machree* better if she didn't stay in such a spotlight.

"Anything in your pockets?"

"O yes, but er, nothing taxable."

"All right Beethoven." And his bags were chalked and he was finally off.

Mark caught up with Kari. He still had not spoken to her since the incident on the ship.

"Identity Papers or Passports." What's this? Two inspectors barred their way. They never usually ask for passports here. Very casually one of the inspectors read Mark's passport: "Mrs. Wilde?" said the man to Kari. "Yes, this is Mrs. Wilde," said Mark and they never even opened her papers. But Mark had not spoken directly to her.

"Tell them I've come to enter a Nunnery," she said

to him trying to brighten things up, and she squeezed his hand a little. Keep those bloody mits! . . . He said nothing . . . Just unctuous pudgy rosebuds with blood-smeared lobster claws where any decent human keeps a pair of hands. He quickly took his hand away.

Standing by the train which runs in twenty minutes through to 'Blackrock into Dublin—if train it was—the Albert Museum would have cleared out any hall to have possessed it—Kari said, trying to brighten things up once more and relieved to be through:

"I came to Ireland once before. I took a train to somewhere, I scarcely know where. A one track line. Halfway, in between the halts, we stopped, and after five minutes I put my head out of the window. The fireman and the driver were picking their way carefully down an incline with packets of sandwiches. I asked 'Will we be staying here long?' 'And Glory be to the Hand of God, by Jasus, Mary and Joseph if there isn't a body travelling!' And they scampered up and drove on in."

6

MARK and Kari climbed into the toy that was the train.

Mark was attentive. He helped Kari up. He took her luggage. Stepped back to let her enter first: to take the seat at the window.

The toy that was the train moved off.

He had not yet said a word, since . . .

Now there were many people in the carriage.

She offered him a chocolate. He shook his head, no.

"They are not poisoned," she said, trying to smile. He smiled weakly but said nothing.

Someone spoke to him. He answered: amiably. But not to her. Funny sort of a wrestling match: how to

get a word out of him. Tiny had warned her "Be careful with Mark. Got all his own laws all worked out: and damn well lives up to them."

The train moved out with the engine so small that only the funnel showed above the platform.

With Roland, with her father, with all her world of men, a refusal was like the starting pistol at a sports match: now we're off. The harder the refusal the more it was so: and that seemed manly, a refusal *should* start the spark to conquer, otherwise where was the man? Look what had happened with Roland? Nearly whipped his neck off and twenty-four hours later he had returned to be her slave for life. Her father had wanted to marry her for a week: had got refused and had made it for life in his next breath. And funny thing is they mean it! Nothing like a refusal: there never was.

Man or not, human or not, in love or out of love, Kari had to get Mark to Finland. O and Whisky: she hadn't told him about Whisky yet: and it would be so much nicer if he knew that *she* had done it.

"Have you got a biscuit, Mark?" she asked.

He found a biscuit. He passed her one.

"Have a biscuit?" he said quite cheerily to his neighbour and he passed them all round.

"Coming to Ireland for your honeymoon?" one asked.

"Honeymoon?" smiled Mark. "No, honeymoon is not the word."

"I said to my wifc here 'They looks freshly married', didn't I, Ellie?"

"You did, John."

Freshly unmarried, thought Mark. "Can't marry relatives," said Mark. "We're relatives."

It was Ellie's turn. "I said so, now didn't I John? I said 'Now John you're wrong. They're relatives'

I said. ‘There’s something about them that is the same.’”

“There is,” said Kari: “something about us that is the same: but some people will never see it. Mark, have you got a match, please?”

And Mark had a match: but not a word.

From Kingstown to Dublin, Mark talked with his neighbours.

At Westland Row, the same attentions, letting her go first, taking all her luggage in spite of his own . . .

She stopped him outside by the station.

“Mark, what’s the matter?”

What’s the matter? Holy mackerel and all the saints and devils combined: aren’t they wonderful, women? What’s the matter? said in the most innocent of voices, like a child before it whimpers. Were you, young lady, on the Irish Mail Train from Crewe to Holyhead, did you see the warmth of two people: did you see how it appeared that one wished another to ask something? Were you there when he asked it? O yes, he wanted to. O yes he meant it, but Mr. Mark Wilde only wants when he’s wanted, only asks when he feels a loving and a longing is reciprocated: in fact his loving depends on that: reciprocation: thank you, he beats no dead horses: there’s an English song ‘If she be not kind to me, what care I how fair she be?’ and that’s not his Bible, it’s more; it’s the way the physical sperms of his make-up work: call makes call: bring on your Venus’s and Cleopatras of all time, if they care nowt for him he is and feels indifferent: he is no Dante who sees a Beatrice crossing a bridge and sighs for the rest of his life: no, even his shy youth had past: Iris and Joan showed him no rebuff and in the end he spoke with Iris though the flame soon burnt out and had left them, just friends: and with Joan? That was a tragedy that had been his final lesson. He

had called on Joan the day after school had finished determined that he must, must speak with her at long last: and found she had moved! taken off as if by a wand! postmen and neighbours, no one knew where: leaving Mark as bitter as gall—he'd only had three years in which to speak to her!!—but cured he was for all time of all that sort of playing about.

And Kari is standing here before him now asking what's the matter? He wants no more stories: he wants no reminder that she is an unwanted child thrown across twenty years from one hell to another: he had granted her all things . . . except the abuse of how she behaved to him.

He bit his lip, looked at her and through her: was she there? he didn't see her: had she asked him something? he didn't hear her any more: did Kari Michelet exist, had she ever existed? if so, he had never heard of her.

He picked up the luggage and went forwards for a taxi.

She put her hand on his: "Mark," she must tell him about Whisky. He took it away as if a leper had touched him. O God, this is horrible. She said nothing. He went to the taxi.

And the champagne this morning. She had meant it, meant it! Yes, yes to speak only the truth in future: didn't he understand? So proud to have got the champagne too.

"If on an orange plantation, the temperature for even one second drops below zero, the whole plantation is nipped dead for all time." He had said that to her once.

They got in the taxi. "Jury's Hotel, please." Now she must speak.

He was somehow extra friendly to everyone else: to the taxi-man, to all.

Who would have thought it, Mark Wilde playing such a childish lover's game! Trying to punish her: extra friendly to others, less to her, because she had been—naughty. Fancy him lowering himself to such babyish things.

He'd get the news about Whisky in a minute.

7

“**THERE**’s a gentleman been expecting you,” said the clerk at the desk.

“Me?” said Mark “But that’s impossible. I told no gentleman that I was coming.”

Police perhaps? After Kari? yet she had heard: and she made no stir.

“He’s here just the same, sir. Mr. Mark Wilde?”

“Yes, that’s me.”

“In the lounge, sir.”

Mark went with Kari to a corner of the hall. He wrote down: “There’s a gentleman waiting to see me. Shall we do anything about this? Shall I see him?”

“Why don’t you talk?” asked Kari, frightened and very angry.

“Later,” he wrote. “Now what about this?”

“Go ahead,” she said, furious.

He went to the lounge.

“Whisky! But this is fantastic! How . . .?”

Whisky went up to the second floor in his own form of lift and in his own way came down again. A man rose from an easy-chair.

“Mr. Wilde?” he asked.

“How did this happen?” asked Mark. “Yes, I’m Mr. Wilde. This is fantastic: astonishing: . . . but rather wonderful, isn’t it Whisky?”

Whisky had never agreed more. His tail had started off on a whole day session.

"Your aunt contacted me," said the man. "The message merely is that they had been in touch with the captain of your vessel and he would be so happy if you would take your dog along as a mascot. They thought you'd be happy too."

"They, who's they?" asked Mark. "Aunt Mabel and who else?"

"They, isn't it they? Your aunt said 'we': but then sometimes that's used as a singular isn't it? I'm sure I have no idea who 'they' are."

Why all this stillness? Whisky wanted activity. He was sniffing at Mark's pocket.

"No, no: down, down. Just one minute Whisky," said Mark. "This is all overwhelming," Mark went on. "Why didn't my aunt tell me about it?"

"Meant it as a surprise I think."

"Most unlike Aunt Mabel. And all this bother. And you? Haven't you been troubled?"

"O, I've been paid," said the man. "Well paid. But if you are very satisfied I will leave you."

"Really? no drink or anything?" asked Mark. "No, no, Whisky: you can't play football in Jury's Hotel. No drink sir?"

"I'd be happiest of all to get off, if you would allow it," said the man.

"Really? I am still flabbergasted, and I can't get over it. You'll leave now, will you? Yes, yes Whisky, we'll take a walk in a second. O dear, I shouldn't have said that word. Any word like 'walk' or 'out' and this dog's crazy till we're on the street. Now *I'll* have to go."

The dog had started a hullabaloo.

They left to go out.

Kari was sitting in the hall.

"This is Mrs. Wilde, my sister-in-law," and Mark introduced her to the man-of-the-dog.

“Very pleased to meet you, ma’am. Just brought the little fellow over. To be mascot on his boat his aunt said. Wonderful little fellow. Mongrel. But very pretty markings. Never seen a dog more pretty. And good. Quiet but good. Easy. It’s my feeling he knew something like this was going to happen.”

Mark had noticed a horrible thing.

Whisky had slunk away from Kari. He had looked at her, put his nose to the ground, and slunk off and sat down. Then he got up and moved about, but not close. It was the only person in the whole of his life, stranger or acquaintance, whom he hadn’t welcomed out of all proportion.

Kari was saying “I’ve never seen Whisky myself, though I’ve heard more about him than I’ve heard about anyone. Whisky, come here,” she called.

Whisky would not. And he showed it. He slunk . . . never seen that slinking action . . . further off.

If it needed one last arrow to pierce Kari’s heart, that was it.

And she had arranged the whole thing! And how complicated it had been! And from that distance! To have organised it all! For Mark! And with the captain of the Finnish vessel! O yes, not Greenland; Fram II it would be. First to Åbo: then to remain in Finland for two months, then, *if* he wanted it, to Australia. *If* he wanted it. But, first for Hamina! Thought there must be only the four of us at Hamina just like then, but given Mark a little extra pride and joy and allowed this silent observer to her great campaign she had plotted all her life. What a nightmare of trouble it had been. And Whisky would have been the final cement to all good things. Wretched little hound. She’d poison it!

IN his room an hour later Kari asked straight out:

“Mark, will you stop playing this game and talk to me?”

He rose. Stalked about. Spoke with everything except his mouth: knit his brows: bit his lips: the fellow looked as if he was going through something himself. At last he took out more wretched paper and wrote:

“I cannot understand this thing myself. I am playing no game. I don’t know what’s happened. I only know that I can never speak another word to you.”

She screwed up the paper: furiously threw it at the dog, who, docile as he never ever had been, did not even take one sniff: went and banged her head on her fists on the mantelpiece. This was sheer lunacy. Should she kill Mark on the spot? Yes, she had a revolver. Only it didn’t look like a revolver. She always had a revolver.

What to do? What to say? Can’t say a thing except to the walls. He’s trying to send me mad, that’s what he’s trying to do.

“You’re trying to send me mad,” she said.

What an idea! So would this send her mad, he thought? It was the first intimation that this thing had given him any sort of power. So there is strength in it, is there?

“You’re trying to send me insane.” she said.

He would not even trouble to write it down that he was not.

She’d kick that wretched dog. Docile under a chair. Would tear the place up after she had gone, she supposed. Just waiting. Whisky, there’s so much I must tell this big fool of yours. I’ve got to get him to Hamina: I do not want to tell him the whole story because that

would spoil it. I've planned this all my life: ever since I was ever so little: and I've made all arrangements: and for afterwards too. We are all to go to Spain: I've planned that too. Just our family. Got Roland and father to Hamina: there's only this clown, who I had so nearly there twelve hours ago. This is mad Whisky, mad, mad, mad: and your stupid master . . . O but he's not master is he? I remember now, you're equals aren't you? someone's *always* master Whisky! . . . your stupid equal then is trying to send me insane. What can I do?

Mark was up. Some more idiotic writing:
"I'm going sight-seeing with Whisky. If you'd like to come, do."

This was the limit.
"Are you going to speak to me?" she asked.
He bit his lips, knit his brows, raised his shoulders and shook his head, trying to say he couldn't help himself: no.

Maybe she'd get some sense if she went. Some moment somewhere. She'd kick his teeth in . . . no good: he made noises anyhow; talked to others as if everything was normal: it was only to her . . . kick his teeth in and he'd scream but not to her.

They were to go. She went behind him and tickled him, tried to lark him into saying something.

He jumped away repulsed as though from hell. Even the docile dog looked wondering if he should attack.

God!
Never in all her life had anyone stuck a dagger in her breast before.

Green, Oscar Wilde's house in Merrion Square, Phoenix Park, any place a dog could visit was visited on that greatest nightmare of her life.

It was not a nightmare to Mark. And she knew it. She was there, as an overcoat might have been there, but he gave no thought to her and could not have cared less however much she suffered.

The dog too had his fun. They were the greatest of companions, dog and man. Why was she shut out? She who had brought it all about? And she who was to bring a sweet and old dream to fruition so soon now? She who at such cost and labour had gathered together her family, who would with pride and joy introduce them one to the other, they who each so loved her.

Not one thing she had omitted: not one thing she had not achieved: in spite of the Allied Police, in spite of Krautz and his family, in spite of . . . herself. It was her one great work and they would be so proud of 'our little Kari: our daughter: our sister.'

If nothing else, she would sit down quietly with Mark and, silence or not, tell him very simply and very truthfully the tale. It would melt him, there was no doubt. But it would kill the fairy story to tell the end, before they were all assembled there together. But anything was worth it, she would tell him.

One thousand times that day the opening phrase was on her lips. "Listen quietly Mark, and you will understand. When I was eight . . ."

Something always happened: the dog ran in a puddle, Mark turned to ask the way of a stranger . . . always something happened and she did not begin.

Never in all her life before such hell to say what she wished to a man.

Of all the hells nothing equals that hell that has been self-made.

Kari knew her whole fine dream, the only great plan of her life, had been within a fraction of being rounded off. It still *must* be. Nothing must ever beat her. She now decided she would tell Mark nothing. She would get him there. Trick him. Put Whisky on the wrong boat as a bait.

She must have the dream exactly as it had been planned! Yes, and she was stronger than anyone. She could achieve anything, command anyone . . . And she was obstinate. Not even a gun at her stomach had lowered her obstinacy more than a fraction.

And how quickly she had done this too. Since that weakling who had picked her up only a month back on a boulevard in Paris with a silly wife called Jeanie Weenie had turned out to be the Roland Johnstone Wilde she had been searching for, how quickly she had achieved the rest—nearly achieved.

She'd *drug* them to get them there!

She had her pride. Everything must be, and would be, just as she had planned.

If only she hadn't . . .

The 'never'; that had been the word that had 'taken it under zero and nipped it dead'. But she had had to, she always had to, had to be extra hard. let them have it with all barrels, always that was in her; never one barrel: the harder, the colder, the fiercer, the more good it did: she had seen that a thousand times: "I'll never marry you" and you had them like dogs for the rest of their lives. If Kari from experience wrote philosophy she would have written "Never means ever. Ever means never." So many pairs swear true love for ever: if God kept one per cent He was lucky.

Say you'll never love a man and he's yours complete with a halter round his neck till the end of time. Mark, wretched student, out-at-elbows, boor, wasn't a man, that was the trouble. Or . . . and Kari bit her lip . . . was the only man. And she had had him, had him, had him . . . eating out of her hand as these English say . . . had him, halter round his neck and all: had him, had only to click her fingers to shut the latch. Clicked the wrong fingers that's all: the wrong latch that's all. He'd got out all right. Like catching a hare . . . or a boar . . . and letting up the door and letting him out, before you had even injured him so that he couldn't get far. Can't injure Mark, that's the trouble. Can catch most on Guilt or Pride or Reputation or Repression: he doesn't feel guilty about anything: he has no pride: he couldn't care less for his reputation, and he doesn't seem to know when he's repressed and when he isn't.

She'd *get* him! She'd said she would and she would.

Getting him was about all Kari understood about love. Might as well explain hate to Mark. He never hated anyone: he felt indifferent that was all. Kari had never loved: she never believed in friendship or love: she thought if you 'got' someone they would stick to you: she believed Himmler's words explicitly and until there was no lane left for retreat she felt she had not 'got' either 'friend' or 'lover'.

Yet there was something about Mark. She knew because never in all her life had she ever wanted to 'get' anyone more. And also he must win, she knew that too. That made it so difficult. And she had never felt that before either. But not *escape*. Win, yes, but not escape altogether like this.

All night, all night, all night she paced her room.

Her Majesty ~~Obstinacy~~ worked out combat with His Majesty ~~Obstinacy~~ sleeping blissfully three rooms away.

She would wake him up. She would tell him the whole truth very simply.

Yes she would wake him up. She would say Roland was sick and asking for him in Finland . . . Yes, yes, that was good! He mightn't listen: might want to telegraph Roland. He wouldn't believe her any more. That was hard. He had always seemed to believe her. Now . . . O why not? why not? Mark, let's go back a few hours: let's cross over from Holyhead again. Such a lovely night it had been. A perfect dawn. Horrible dawn! why had it come? She had planned it all so brilliantly: and how very different . . .

Never in all her life before had she missed a night's sleep for a man.

He'll pay for this!

Everyone will pay for this!

Everyone will pay for everything! The world is hers and she will crush it. Nothing will hurt her. She will crush it. Krautz, Tribunals, War Crimes, she had tricked them all forever . . . but just now here was an obstinate six foot and something, mop of hair, harmonica playing student and his dog and they were her menu on her plate this night.

What to do? What to do? What to do? The hours run out. Twenty-four hours and he'll be gone . . . this time tomorrow: I might never see him again: O I can't, can't bear that!

Mark, I'll come and kiss your feet. Your filthy un-blacked shoes. Your filthy unwashed feet. I'll kiss them. Will *that* impress you? But I must *win* you: I must, I must, I must. O Mark, you're winning me so quickly: keep on with your damn obstinacy if you must: show me love, Mark, in the name of heaven

and hell as well, show me love. Show us all love. O build, Architect of Clucktown, build love, here in my heart, O Mark I am coming to you, coming, show me, teach me this inconceivable thing that you call love. Build; snoring, six foot, filthy-feeted, filthy-nailed, Architectural hole-in-the-trousers lamppost, teach me and I will come down your path to Love.

But speak, speak to me, else I'll go lunatic, and I'll tear the world down, and you, and Whisky, the whole damn world, I'll tear them down, but speak, speak, speak.

She flung open her door. Two steps out. She turned to the door jamb . . . yes it always was a door jamb, wasn't it? . . . O my head, my head! and she beat it, beat it, beat it.

Is this a clutching at my heart? She put her hand there. Some sharp pain. Is this love? Does love only hurt? No, Marky, big lout Marky, says love does not hurt: didn't he say something like that? I think something like that? so this is not love I feel, not love, not love: it hurts so, it hurts

I understand nothing: what have I done? Given hell to millions. I am sorry, millions, I am sorry. What can I do to make it up? Marky does that; doing it for you, eh, millions? I am sorry. Shall I go and give you up my life? Does it help if I admit to all things? Does it help you to do to me what I did to you, or, more simply, end my life? My life, my life: I love it, I love it: I accepted an eternity of blackmail that I wouldn't lose my young life in a prison. Can't you forgive, forget? Marky did. Marky was willing to forgive, forget. But then he didn't suffer did he? He wasn't one of the millions was he? See what he does now when I hurt him? Selfish isn't he? Can hurt the world, but

not *him*? That's a fine attitude, isn't it, millions? Willing to forgive all the tortures I gave to you: *but* half a dozen hard words to him and he tortures me for life. Nice little hypocrite isn't he, our Marky?

But you couldn't hurt me back, could you? O no, Hitler never let you have the chance. Our slaves, our lice and offal? You couldn't even answer back, could you? Only now you get the chance. Shall I go, shall I go to the tribunals? It wouldn't help, you know? It wouldn't. Wouldn't make right one thing you know? Not one.

That's what Mark thought. Life always begins from this moment on, that's what he said. You see? it's what I do now. But if so, why can't he forgive last night? I meant nothing. I'm going to make it right. Millions, I'm going to make it right. I'll make it right with all of you. But how, how? And isn't it because I've broken the 11th commandment? Eh? Thou shall not be found out? Haven't I broken that? Really it's the first commandment, really . . .

She almost dented the door jamb. She went back.

The sands are running out, running out, running out. If I sleep . . . all is lost and over. How I sleep: he'll be gone and no good-byes perhaps.

Perhaps it's not good if I wake him up. I'd always murder anyone who woke me up.

O I'm ill: I want to kill: I want to torture: I am such a mess: inside: if only I could live without my inside: it's what goes on inside: I'm not so bad . . . outside. Attractive really.

She sat before the mirror.

O so wondrously attractive. I love Kari . . . Michelet. Whatever is my name? It's not Wilde: it's not Michelet. I am the daughter of Prince Sh—: but my name would not be Sh—: something else: O here's a lady twenty-one years old looking in the mirror asking

the world a question: what is my name? Why they might have called me anything. Imagine that!

Children *must* be wanted. I'll write ten commandments and all are that children must be wanted. Then they all are also: that Mark *must* love me.

What a funny thing to say. Love? Heeeee! Am I getting soft then? And for so much uncouthness, unclean-ness? Mark you have a clean mind, a foolish stone-like obstinate heart, and everything else about you is dirty.

He's getting up so early to go to Belfast.

The sands have nearly run.

If I went to sleep . . . I would miss him.

Love. Fancy, I have never *really* used that word before.

II

MARK was awake betimes. The moment he stirred Whisky stirred. When he got up, Whisky got up. Mark went to him.

"There's something very right about your being here, Whisky," said Mark. "Though it's a miracle: and I don't understand it. There's a special right about it just now." The dog sat back. Just on his two hind legs. Better get comfortable. Maybe here was one of Mark's long speeches.

"Let's find me a wife Whisky. Let our song be," . . . and he was singing as the door was opening,

"We'll be coming round the mountain when she sings . . . O no, we're forgetting our geography aren't we?

"We'll be coming round the glacier when she sings,

"We'll be coming round the glacier when she sings,

"Singing hi hi yip-py-ip-pi,

"Hi hi yip-py-ip-py

“O—”

And Kari was before them.

She had hardly come in. Just hung at the door.

“Please continue,” she tried to smile. “I like it,” she made herself say. The dog had gone under the chair. Docile again. Never was he like it . . . “I haven’t heard you sing that,” she said; “since Rockdon scored at Wembley.” Remind him of something nice together anyhow.

Mark did not continue.

She must tell him, must, must, must.

She sat on the edge of the bed.

He wished he could feel differently. This was hell, terrible to treat her so. He just had to clean himself of something. One word to her and he would have entered into something . . . which at the very least would kill dead all his trip to Greenland. But more, more than that: he had to have a holiday: get clean from something, in mind, spirit . . . swine or not, demon or not, wrong or not, one word and he would be back into something that he just had to keep out of. She was tricky, she was complicated. There may be 10,000 reasons. He had been willing to accept the 10,000 reasons, but relationships he to her and she to him had to remain simple: there is no great and intimate relationship where you watch the other like a hawk—or like a fish in a sea it knows is strewn with nets: he could have taken on all her complications and he would never have been her judge, he was only a common twenty-year-old himself and all he knew about his own mind was that it was thick, whenever was he going to be able to see clearly out of it? But loyalty and faith, and, if it was to be, then love, must be very simple and straight between them, otherwise . . . he could feel no love.

She was speaking to him. But he must collect his

things and leave.

“Mark, when I was eight . . .”

Yes he only had a few minutes. Amiens Street Station wasn’t it? Packed your dress-suit Whisky? O no, I see, you’ve got it on. Ruffled as usual.

“When I was ~~eight~~,” Kari was saying, “. . . that’s the truth because I’m always trying to tell myself it was earlier . . . I’m going to say such a silly thing. I’m afraid you’ll laugh. I found something. I always told myself my mother gave it me. Or my father. But I usually like to think my mother. It’s ever so small. Ever so silly. You’ll think it absolutely silly. I’m afraid you’ll laugh. It’s ever so tiny, ever so small? don’t think it’s anything serious or anything, or big . . . You see . . . I have a little something. It’s about the size of a sixpence. Now I’ve always had that. I like to think. But *really* since I was eight. It’s got a little harlequin and a pussy on it. I’ve had it much much longer than that chemistry set thing. And perhaps my mother did give it to me: left it on me or something. I’ve always thought when my mother gave it to me she said ‘That’s for luck.’ And I wonder . . . it’s awfully silly, and I suppose you’ll think it is . . . if I might give it to you?”

He sat down. Was she trying to break his heart? . . .

“I’m not trying to trick you, to make you speak . . .”

You always said I’d never know your trick from a non-trick, how the bloody hell can I ever, ever, ever believe you, Kari? Look at last night. Yes! look at last night! Ending with champagne! Christ what sort of a game is that? And what sort of a game is this? Kari, this comes from the rottenest part of your mind . . . or from the very bottom-most part of your heart. To think that only you know! I have been warned.

“Only you must keep it,” she was saying. “I don’t want you to take it if you won’t keep it. And you must

never, never lose it, will you, because it's for good luck and I'm very, very superstitious. And it's all, in a way . . . all, in a way . . . everything I've really got, everything that counts . . . it's all that's left from . . . mother and father . . . and I'd like you to have it . . . sort of feel comfy, you going a-round with it . . . of course it will bring you luck! . . . it *will* . . . and you could . . .” she was going to say ‘think of me’, but she said “it will bring you luck.”

God, he would be scared of losing it. This *is* a new torment.

“Don't keep it round your neck,” she was saying. “I've always been lucky with it, so you must. I'll get it.”

She was gone a few minutes, getting, almost burstingly, so *tearfully* excited as she went. He put his things together. She returned and stood very close by him and she put it in his hand, biting away at her lips. A little thing, it could have cost twopence in Woolworths: a little harlequin and a little pussy.

PURE GOLD FROM ONE HEART TO ANOTHER.

He raised her chin, and with a look which said the world, but still no words, no words, he nodded yes, yes he'd keep it ever and he thanked her . . . from the bottom of his heart.

No words, no words!! She would go mad. O was there any torture more cruel?

“When I was eight,” she was beginning again. She'd tell him everything, everything! And then he could do what he liked, but he must know! “When I was eight . . .”

“Your taxi's at the door sir,” a knock had come. The wretched door-boy. The dog was up. All was a flurry. She was muttering away, “When I was eight, when I was eight, when I was eight, when I was eight,

when I was eight, when I was eight, when I was eight,
when I was eight, when I was eight, when I was eight,
when I was eight, when I was eight, when I was eight,
when I was eight, when I was eight, when I was eight,
when I was eight, when I was eight, when I was eight,
when I was eight, WHEN I WAS EIGHT!!!!
O GOD! that I had ever lived! O God! O God!"

She plunged to the bed. He went to her.

"Leave me alone!! You want me insane!! I'll be insane!! Go!! Go!! But don't touch me!! Never, never touch me!! One day you'll understand!! O mother, o father, why didn't you want your daughter?" And she cried into the pillow. His pillow. Better leave tears there. On his pillow. Never on hers. Kari Michelet would never cry on her pillow: O God, break my heart now, there is nothing else to break. This wretch wants me to go to the station? Why? Why? I don't understand. To play this cruel farce to the end?

When I was eight I was telling him . . . and the door-boy came. He would have listened he would. I could have come earlier only I didn't want to wake him. He would have understood, he would. Nice look he gave me. Blessed little harlequin. Nearly brought me luck. Lovely little thing. My only friend: harlequin: and pussy. Look out now Kari Michelet, you've given your good luck away! Given it to the driver as the last fling from a poor crumpled devil trying to thumb a lift to heaven. Never, never really tried before in all my life, to thumb a lift to heaven.

O'I'll go to the station. To go through this to the end.
I must, I must tell him.

12

Now calmly, calmly: I have to do this very calmly. Now what is there to do? To tell him about the wind-jammer: that he can go to Finland. That Roland expects him. That I will meet him there, give him his

true answer there; that we will all of us meet there and go to Spain, to Murcia, where I have bought . . . That the captain said . . . that it was she who had arranged about Whisky . . . that he could even go with the ship to Australia . . . if he really wanted to . . . after . . . after . . . Hamina crossing, then . . . O yes, yes: most important, first to tell him about . . . well about everything . . . how it began, who they all are . . . why she did it . . . everything like that. He *must* like that: he *is* human was her Marky, he *is*, he *is*; he *must* like that . . . only he must speak to her. Life is suddenly so important. Mark is suddenly so important.

Here was the station. O golly, things do go quickly.

"Look there's the train to Kingstown and London over the bridge on No. 3 platform," she said. "Goes out five minutes before yours Mark. Fancy, if I took it," she tried to smile, "and went back to London, I would be arrested there by the Allied Police and I would be absolutely finished. But that's not very funny, is it? Your train's not in yet. It's just coming."

She lost her temper and all control.

"O God! speak to me! you hellish devil you! Speak, Mark, speak!"

Tears came to his eyes. He shook his head, no, no.

"What's the matter? Are you raving mad?"

He couldn't explain. He never, never could explain. Something had happened: something he had never dreamt of: he couldn't speak to her: she didn't exist for him: he didn't want to hurt her, hated it, suffered himself: but she just didn't exist in his mind: she was something he must not, must not speak to: he couldn't explain it: he couldn't explain it ever: he never had understood himself: and he couldn't understand this. Sometimes things happened to him, and now this had happened. It was last night. Something. She shouldn't have done it. Normally he always for-

gave and forgot. It was too much . . . and she had . . . died . . . for him.

His breath was coming quickly, he seemed struggling, struggling: . . . but no speech, no words . . .

"Then the blood be on your head!!" she screeched and marched off.

He could see what she would do! If it meant anything to him at all he could stop her marching to her death! surely he must stop her!! Yes, she'd take that train to London, she'd be arrested by the Intelligence: and all the so so beautiful plans she had had for all, yes for all of them, would be lost, lost, wasted, wasted, her one so lovely dream never to materialise. If he had anything, anything human to him he must stop her!! he *must*. Surely this *must* make him show a glimmer of human life again!!!

She walked straight towards the bridge. What was she doing?

Up the bridge . . . to the London platform . . .

His train roared in.

A boy dropped his great ball and it rolled to the line. Whisky was after it.

In a flash Mark whipped out his harmonica and flung it across the track.

"Fetch it Whisky, fetch it. And wait!!" he screamed with all his might against the drowning roar of the train.

The train tore in

The train pulled up.

Mark called quietly:

"Whisky, are you there? Come slowly, very slowly."

And very slowly the dog came. Smelt the ball. But left it.

Mark lay down: grabbed his dog up. As whole as whole . . . But terrified and shaking. And with the harmonica.

"You'll soon be all right," said Mark.

The dog shuddered, looked frightened. What was that noise going on on the other side of the station?

"It's only the London train pulling out Whisky," said Mark. "What was that that Kari had said? The blood? What blood? . . ."

13

THERE is a mount in Murcia runs down to meet the sea, where slopes of maize and mulberry grow, where the orange and the olives grow, where peace and joy and dreaming grow, and grow into the sea.

Brown stands the path, brown stands the earth, brown stands the house, above the blue sea.

The house has four bedrooms and is most sumptuously furnished. One bedroom it would seem is for a woman and three for three single men.

It has never been occupied though it has been rented ever since the war.

Lately the shutters have battered so in every breeze that the neighbours had thought that they should break into it to fasten them securely.

But at the gate they met he from whom the house had been rented.

He was taking a sign down.

And the sign was the sign that she who had rented it had caused to be erected.

And in his hand was a morning newspaper containing the latest lists of the Allies' Intelligence arrests in London.

And in the lists was the name of she who had rented the house.

And the name of she who had rented the house was Kari Michelet.

And the name she had caused to be erected was: "My Castle in the Air."

